



A SHEPHERD OF BETHLEHEM

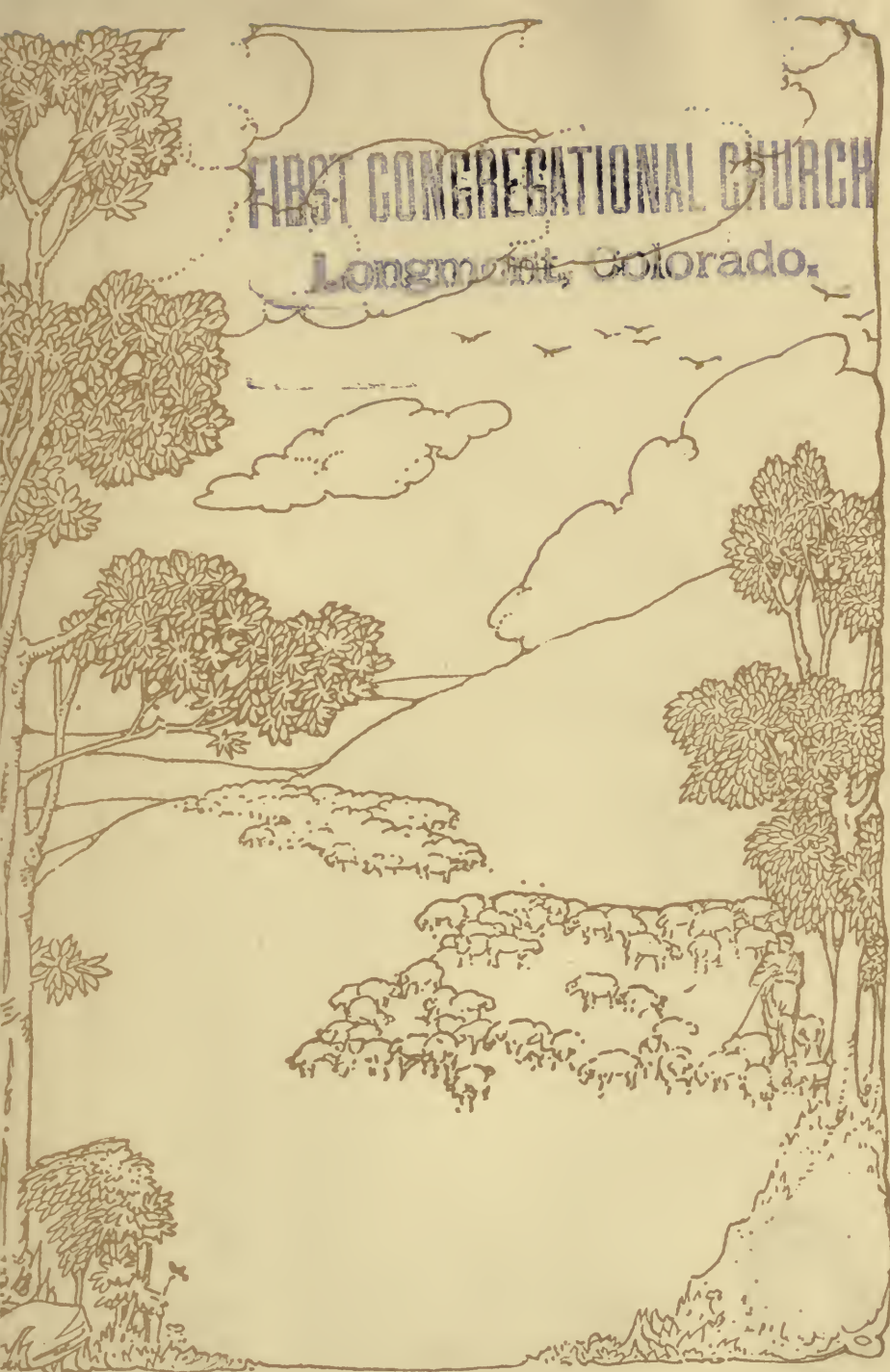
JAMES M. LINDLOW.

#232



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

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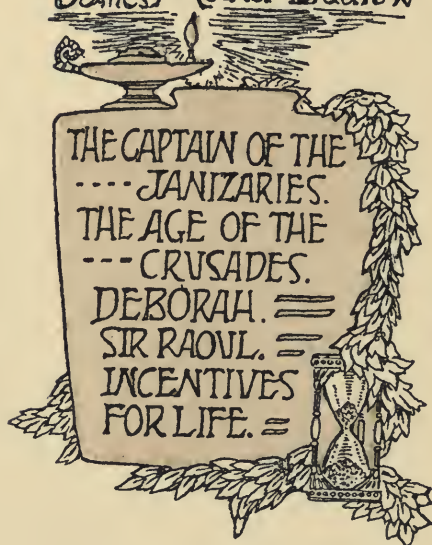


Jesse
ben
David

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A SHEP-
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The Works of
James Meeker Ludlow





The Coming of the King.

Jesse ben David
A SHEPHERD OF BETHLEHEM

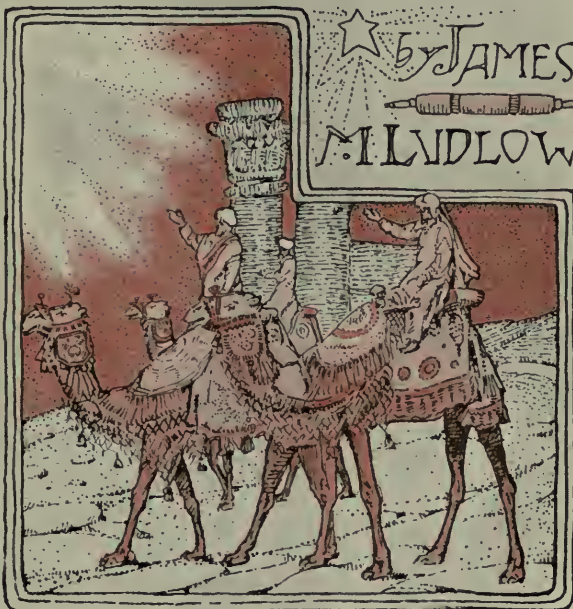


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Jesse ben David
A SHEPHERD of BETHLEHEM

by JAMES
MILNDLOW




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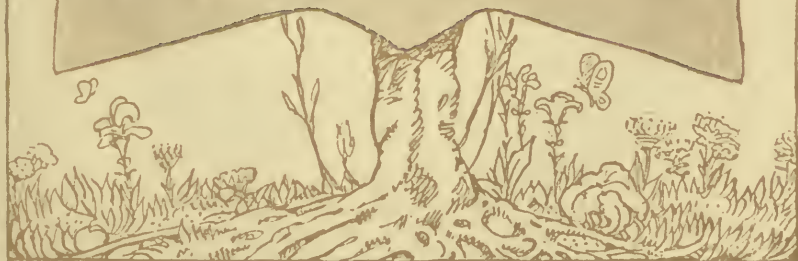
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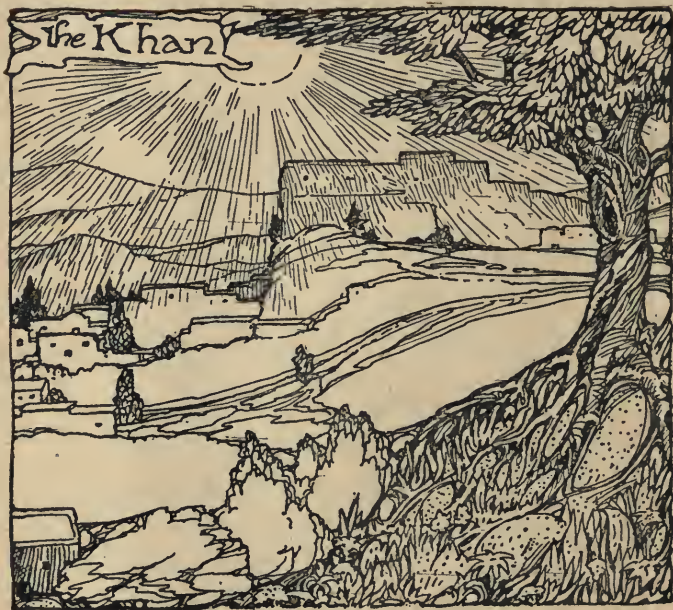
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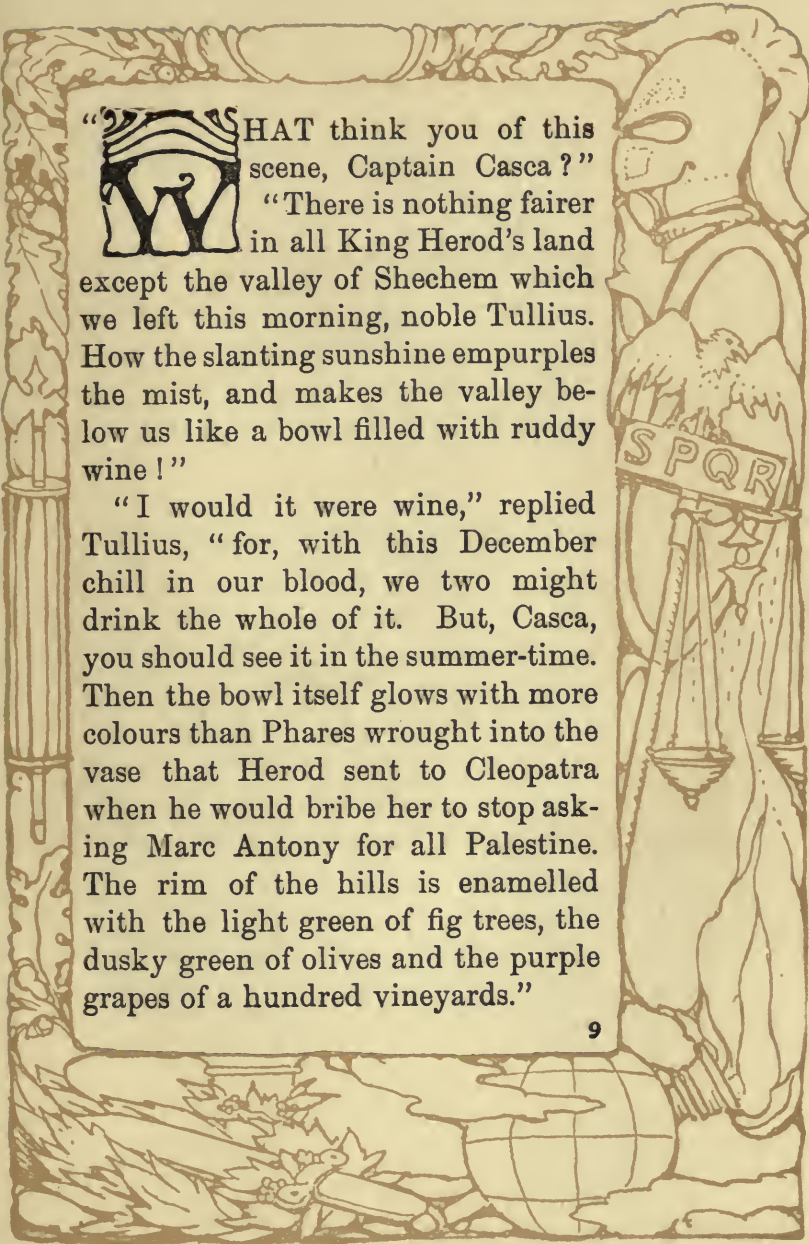


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"WHAT think you of this scene, Captain Casca?"

"There is nothing fairer in all King Herod's land except the valley of Shechem which we left this morning, noble Tullius. How the slanting sunshine empurples the mist, and makes the valley below us like a bowl filled with ruddy wine!"

"I would it were wine," replied Tullius, "for, with this December chill in our blood, we two might drink the whole of it. But, Casca, you should see it in the summer-time. Then the bowl itself glows with more colours than Phares wrought into the vase that Herod sent to Cleopatra when he would bribe her to stop asking Marc Antony for all Palestine. The rim of the hills is enamelled with the light green of fig trees, the dusky green of olives and the purple grapes of a hundred vineyards."



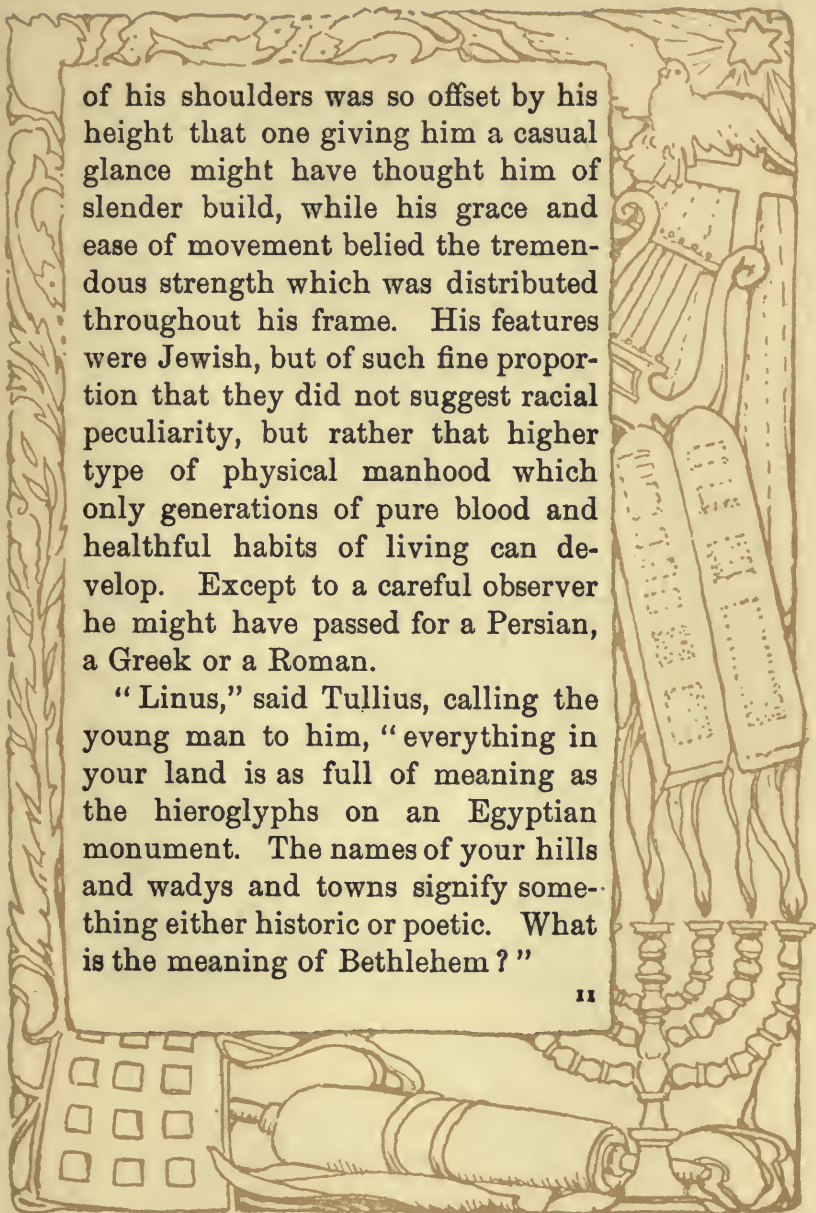
The speakers were Romans. One wore a casque of linked steel, from the belt of which hung a thick double-edged short sword, the uniform of a centurion. An embroidered tunic, covering an underdress of white wool, betokened that the other was of aristocratic rank.

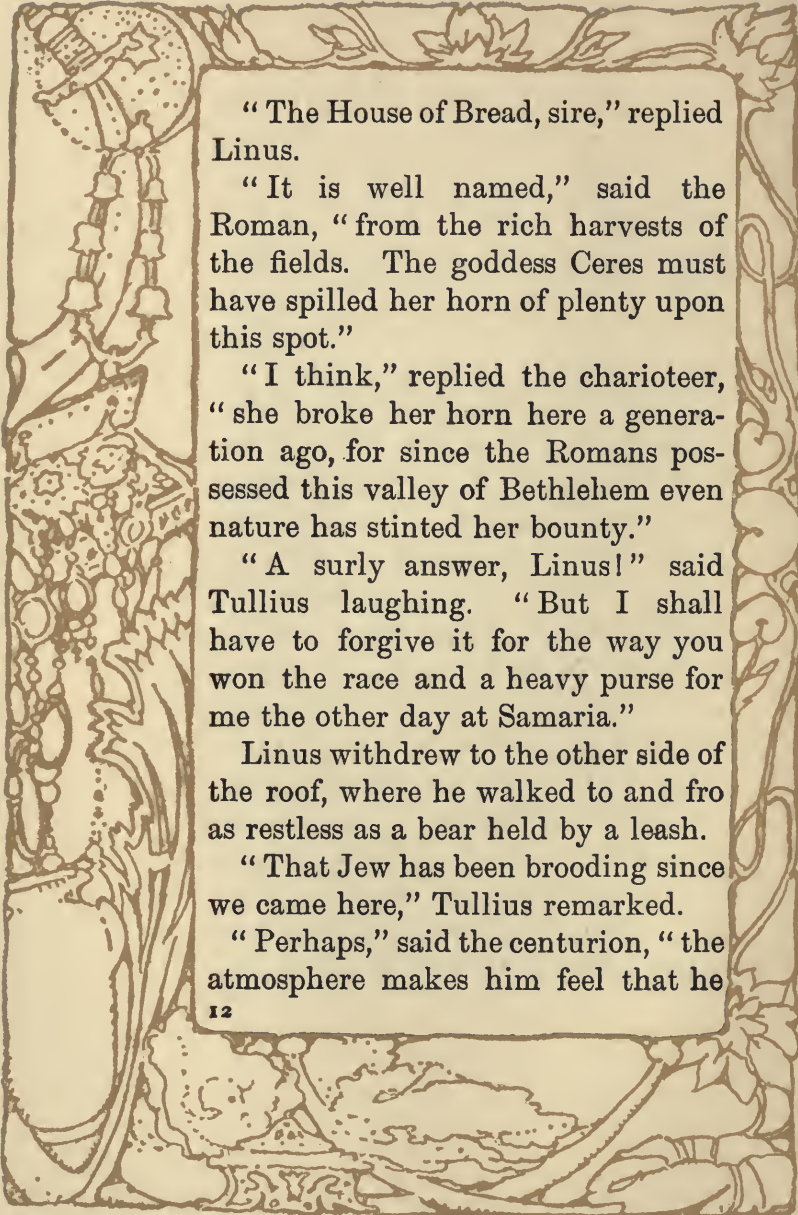
They were sitting upon the low stone parapet that ran around the flat roof of the Khan of Bethlehem. This far-famed and far-seen inn crowned a narrow ledge of rock upon which the little village was built, and, rising high in the air, suggested a sentinel standing guard over the sleeping hills.

At the other end of the parapet walked a man who wore the garb of a charioteer. He was young and of superb form. The long muscles of his forearm, which was uncovered, would have delighted a trainer in the gymnasium. The great breadth

of his shoulders was so offset by his height that one giving him a casual glance might have thought him of slender build, while his grace and ease of movement belied the tremendous strength which was distributed throughout his frame. His features were Jewish, but of such fine proportion that they did not suggest racial peculiarity, but rather that higher type of physical manhood which only generations of pure blood and healthful habits of living can develop. Except to a careful observer he might have passed for a Persian, a Greek or a Roman.

"Linus," said Tullius, calling the young man to him, "everything in your land is as full of meaning as the hieroglyphs on an Egyptian monument. The names of your hills and wadys and towns signify something either historic or poetic. What is the meaning of Bethlehem?"





“The House of Bread, sire,” replied Linus.

“It is well named,” said the Roman, “from the rich harvests of the fields. The goddess Ceres must have spilled her horn of plenty upon this spot.”

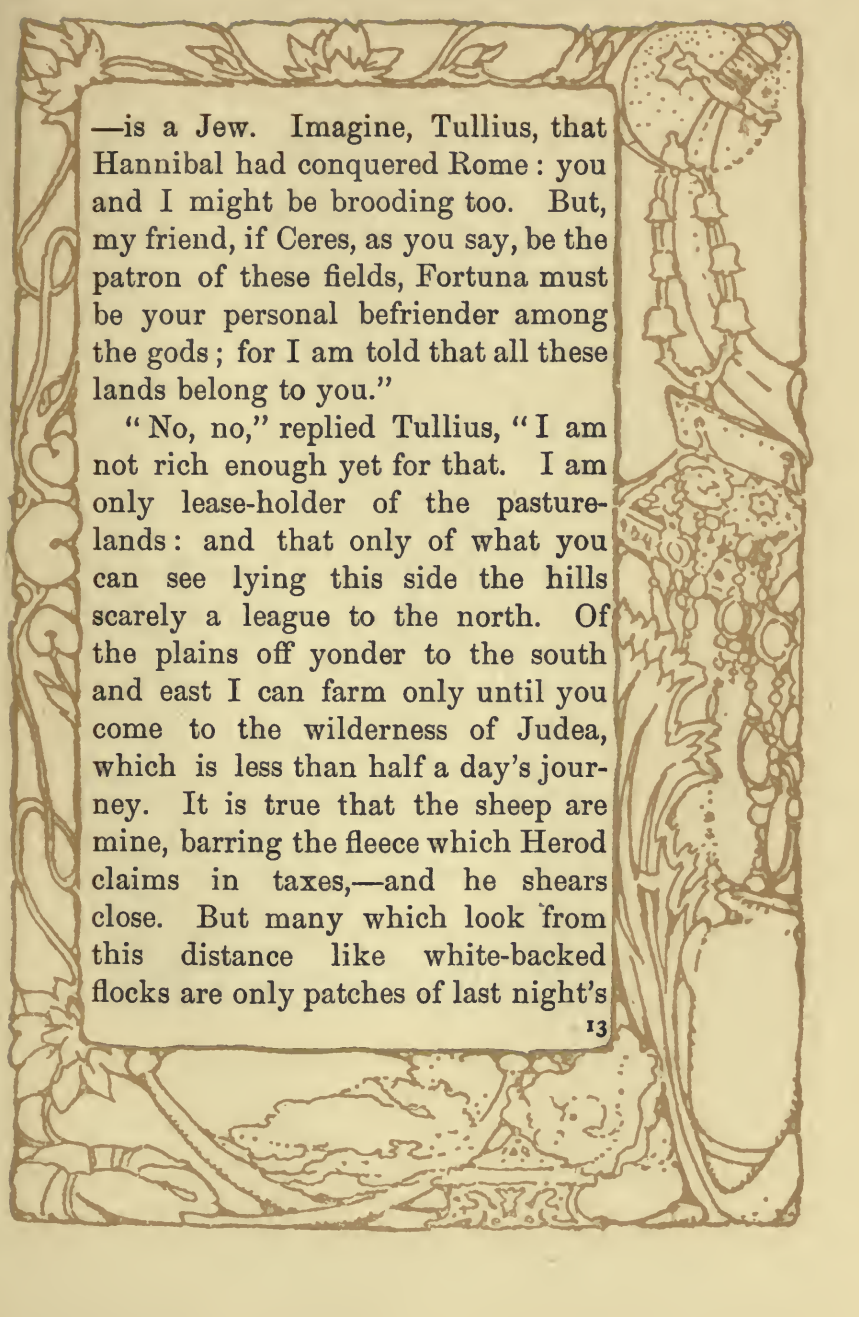
“I think,” replied the charioteer, “she broke her horn here a generation ago, for since the Romans possessed this valley of Bethlehem even nature has stinted her bounty.”

“A surly answer, Linus!” said Tullius laughing. “But I shall have to forgive it for the way you won the race and a heavy purse for me the other day at Samaria.”

Linus withdrew to the other side of the roof, where he walked to and fro as restless as a bear held by a leash.

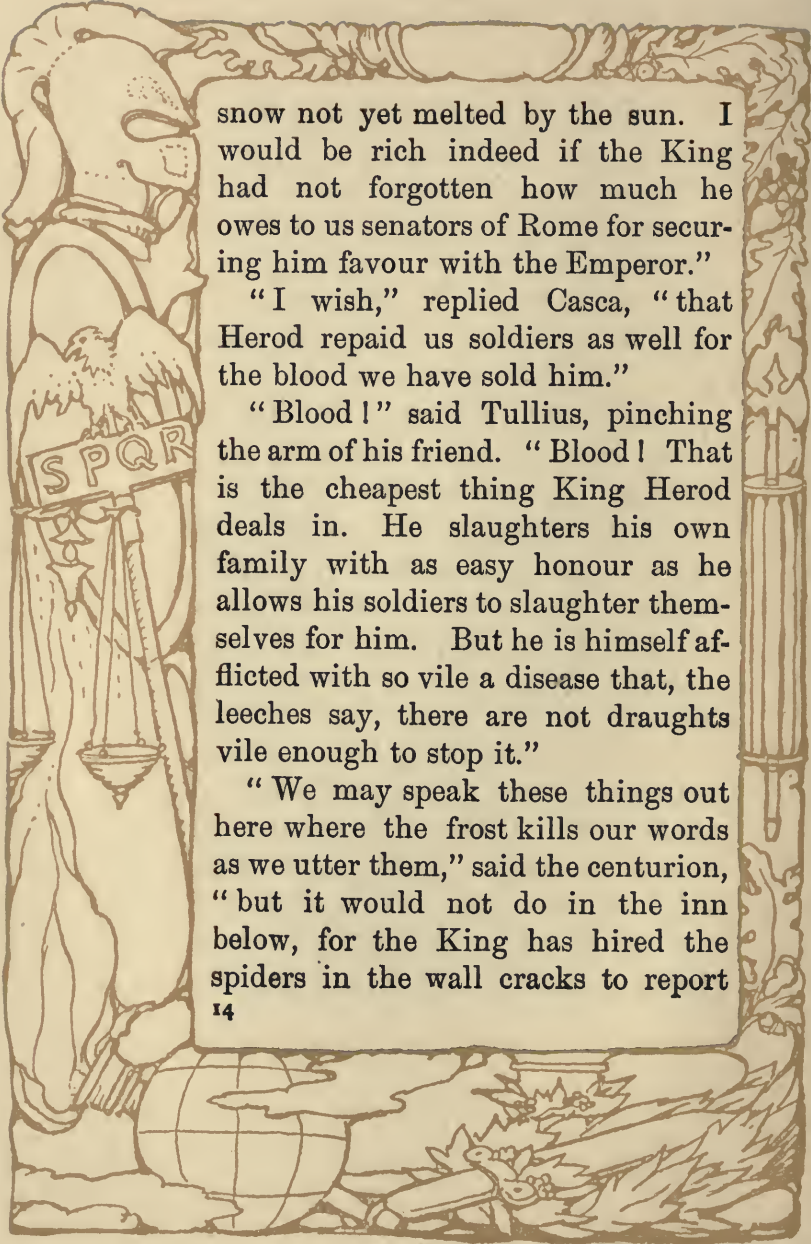
“That Jew has been brooding since we came here,” Tullius remarked.

“Perhaps,” said the centurion, “the atmosphere makes him feel that he



—is a Jew. Imagine, Tullius, that Hannibal had conquered Rome: you and I might be brooding too. But, my friend, if Ceres, as you say, be the patron of these fields, Fortuna must be your personal befriender among the gods; for I am told that all these lands belong to you."

"No, no," replied Tullius, "I am not rich enough yet for that. I am only lease-holder of the pasture-lands: and that only of what you can see lying this side the hills scarcely a league to the north. Of the plains off yonder to the south and east I can farm only until you come to the wilderness of Judea, which is less than half a day's journey. It is true that the sheep are mine, barring the fleece which Herod claims in taxes,—and he shears close. But many which look from this distance like white-backed flocks are only patches of last night's



snow not yet melted by the sun. I would be rich indeed if the King had not forgotten how much he owes to us senators of Rome for securing him favour with the Emperor."

"I wish," replied Casca, "that Herod repaid us soldiers as well for the blood we have sold him."

"Blood!" said Tullius, pinching the arm of his friend. "Blood! That is the cheapest thing King Herod deals in. He slaughters his own family with as easy honour as he allows his soldiers to slaughter themselves for him. But he is himself afflicted with so vile a disease that, the leeches say, there are not draughts vile enough to stop it."

"We may speak these things out here where the frost kills our words as we utter them," said the centurion, "but it would not do in the inn below, for the King has hired the spiders in the wall cracks to report

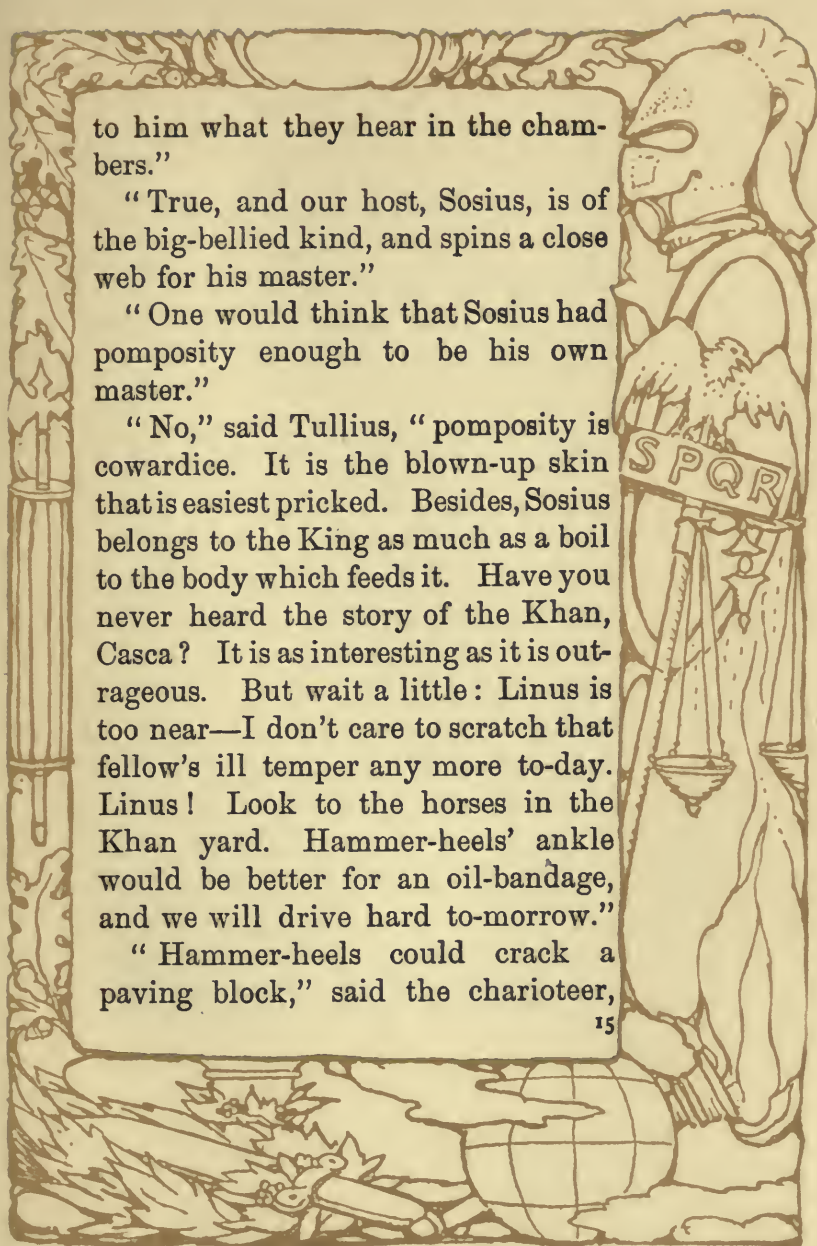
to him what they hear in the chambers."

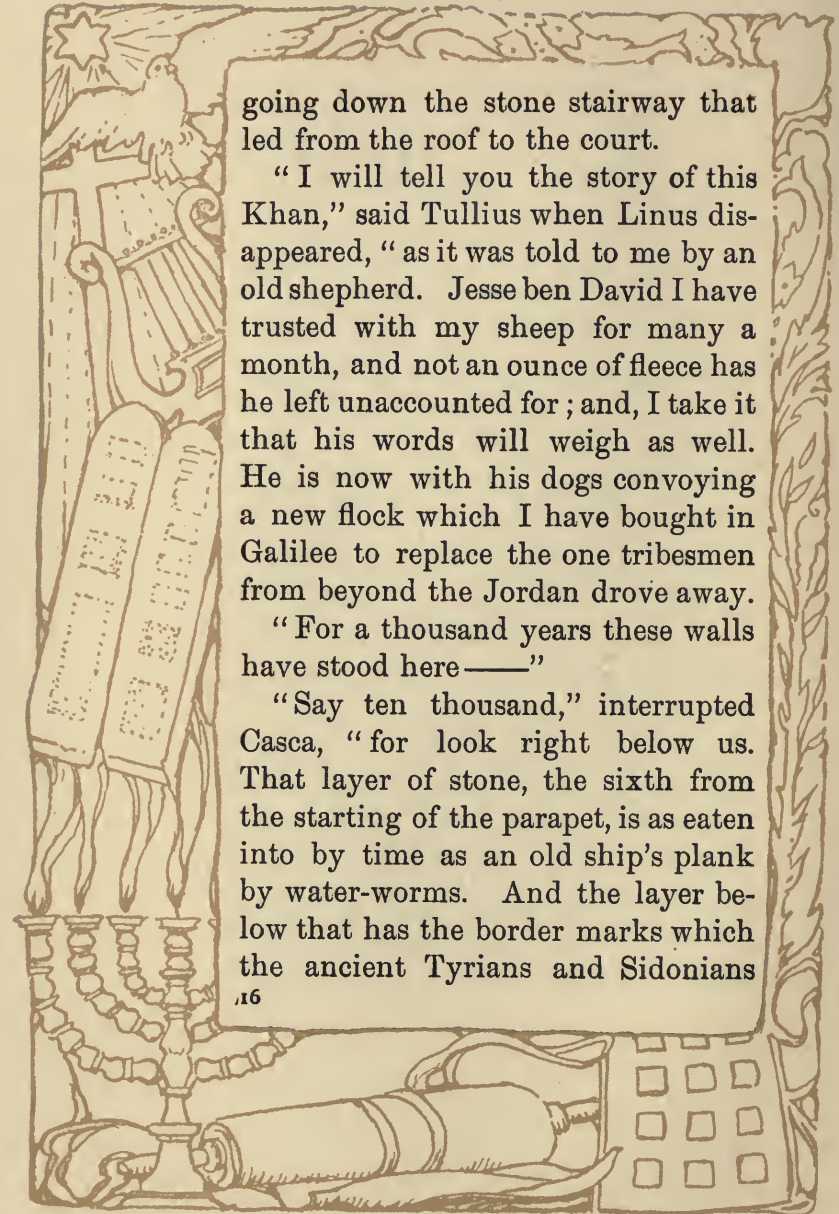
"True, and our host, Sosius, is of the big-bellied kind, and spins a close web for his master."

"One would think that Sosius had pomposity enough to be his own master."

"No," said Tullius, "pomposity is cowardice. It is the blown-up skin that is easiest pricked. Besides, Sosius belongs to the King as much as a boil to the body which feeds it. Have you never heard the story of the Khan, Casca? It is as interesting as it is outrageous. But wait a little: Linus is too near—I don't care to scratch that fellow's ill temper any more to-day. Linus! Look to the horses in the Khan yard. Hammer-heels' ankle would be better for an oil-bandage, and we will drive hard to-morrow."

"Hammer-heels could crack a paving block," said the charioteer,



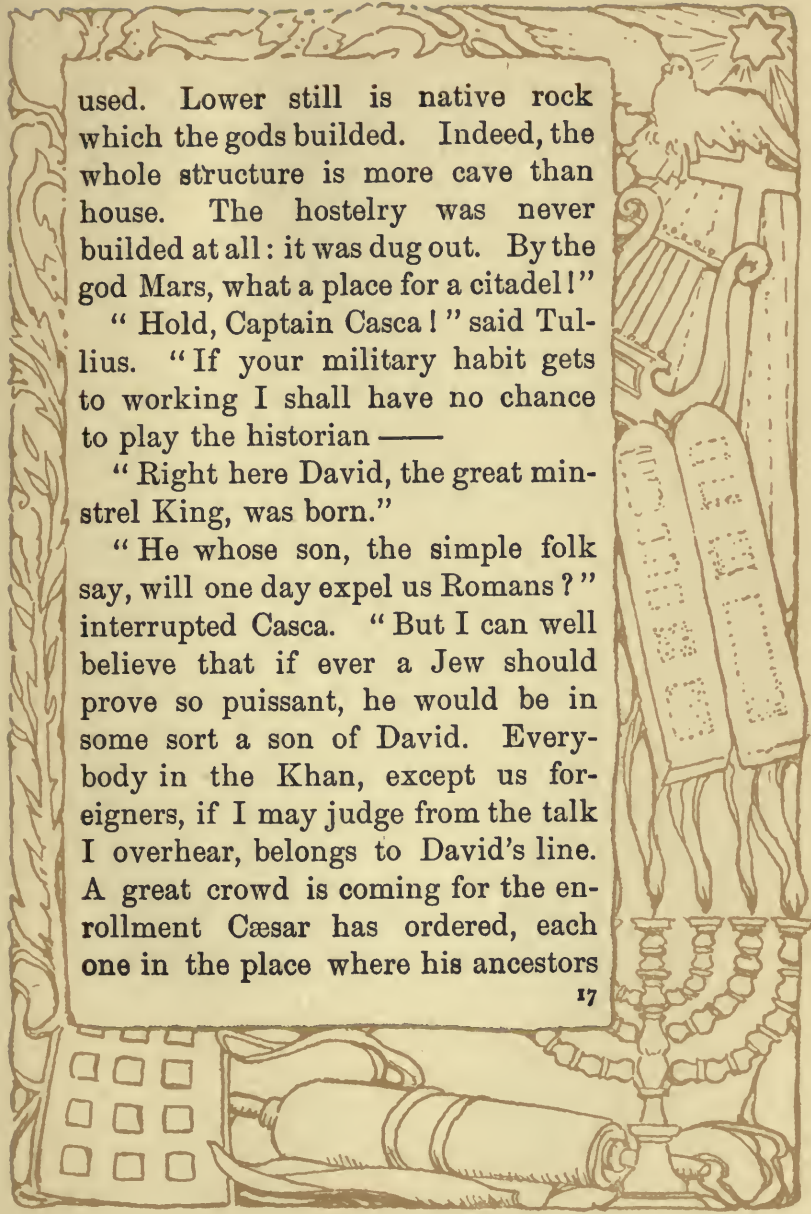


going down the stone stairway that led from the roof to the court.

"I will tell you the story of this Khan," said Tullius when Linus disappeared, "as it was told to me by an old shepherd. Jesse ben David I have trusted with my sheep for many a month, and not an ounce of fleece has he left unaccounted for; and, I take it that his words will weigh as well. He is now with his dogs convoying a new flock which I have bought in Galilee to replace the one tribesmen from beyond the Jordan drove away.

"For a thousand years these walls have stood here——"

"Say ten thousand," interrupted Casca, "for look right below us. That layer of stone, the sixth from the starting of the parapet, is as eaten into by time as an old ship's plank by water-worms. And the layer below that has the border marks which the ancient Tyrians and Sidonians

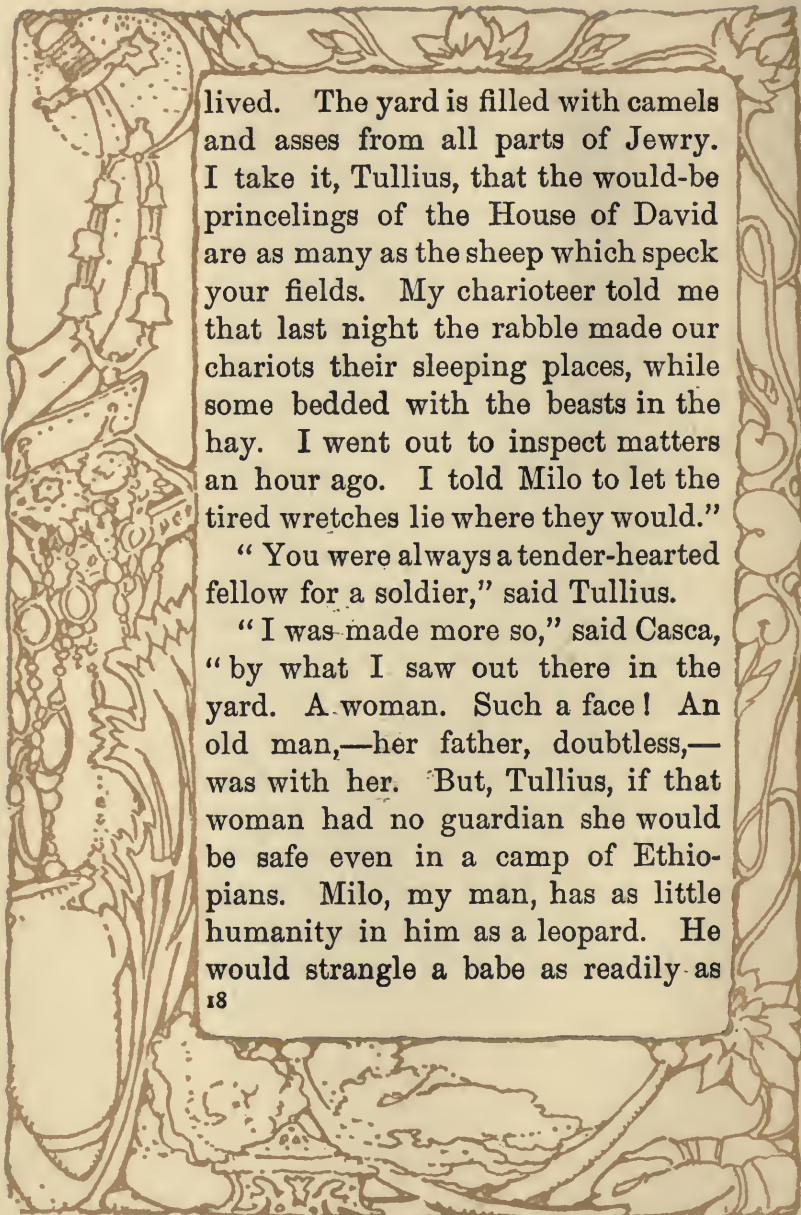


used. Lower still is native rock which the gods builded. Indeed, the whole structure is more cave than house. The hostelry was never builded at all: it was dug out. By the god Mars, what a place for a citadel!"

"Hold, Captain Casca!" said Tullius. "If your military habit gets to working I shall have no chance to play the historian ——"

"Right here David, the great minstrel King, was born."

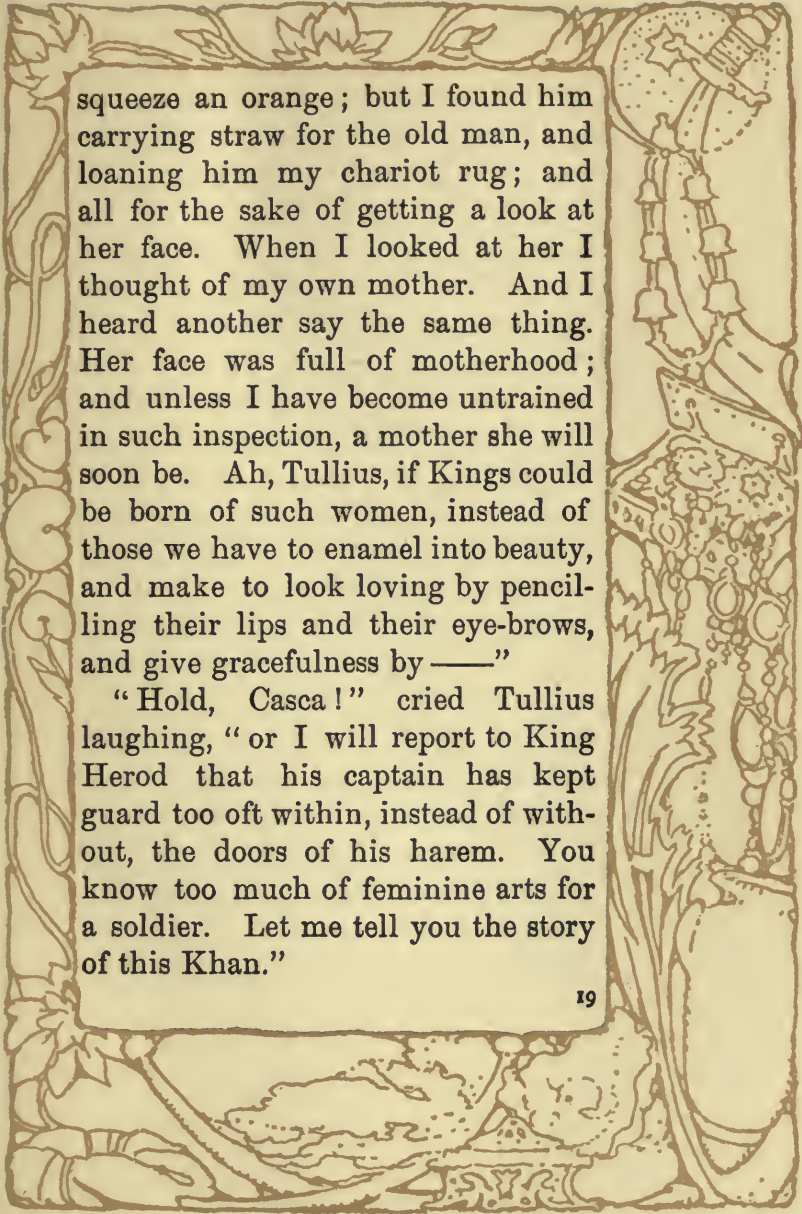
"He whose son, the simple folk say, will one day expel us Romans?" interrupted Casca. "But I can well believe that if ever a Jew should prove so puissant, he would be in some sort a son of David. Everybody in the Khan, except us foreigners, if I may judge from the talk I overhear, belongs to David's line. A great crowd is coming for the enrollment Cæsar has ordered, each one in the place where his ancestors



lived. The yard is filled with camels and asses from all parts of Jewry. I take it, Tullius, that the would-be princelings of the House of David are as many as the sheep which speck your fields. My charioteer told me that last night the rabble made our chariots their sleeping places, while some bedded with the beasts in the hay. I went out to inspect matters an hour ago. I told Milo to let the tired wretches lie where they would."

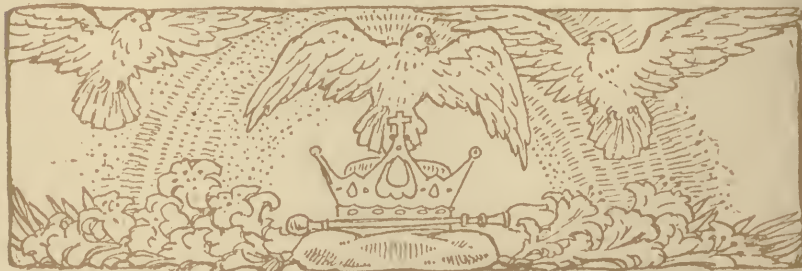
"You were always a tender-hearted fellow for a soldier," said Tullius.

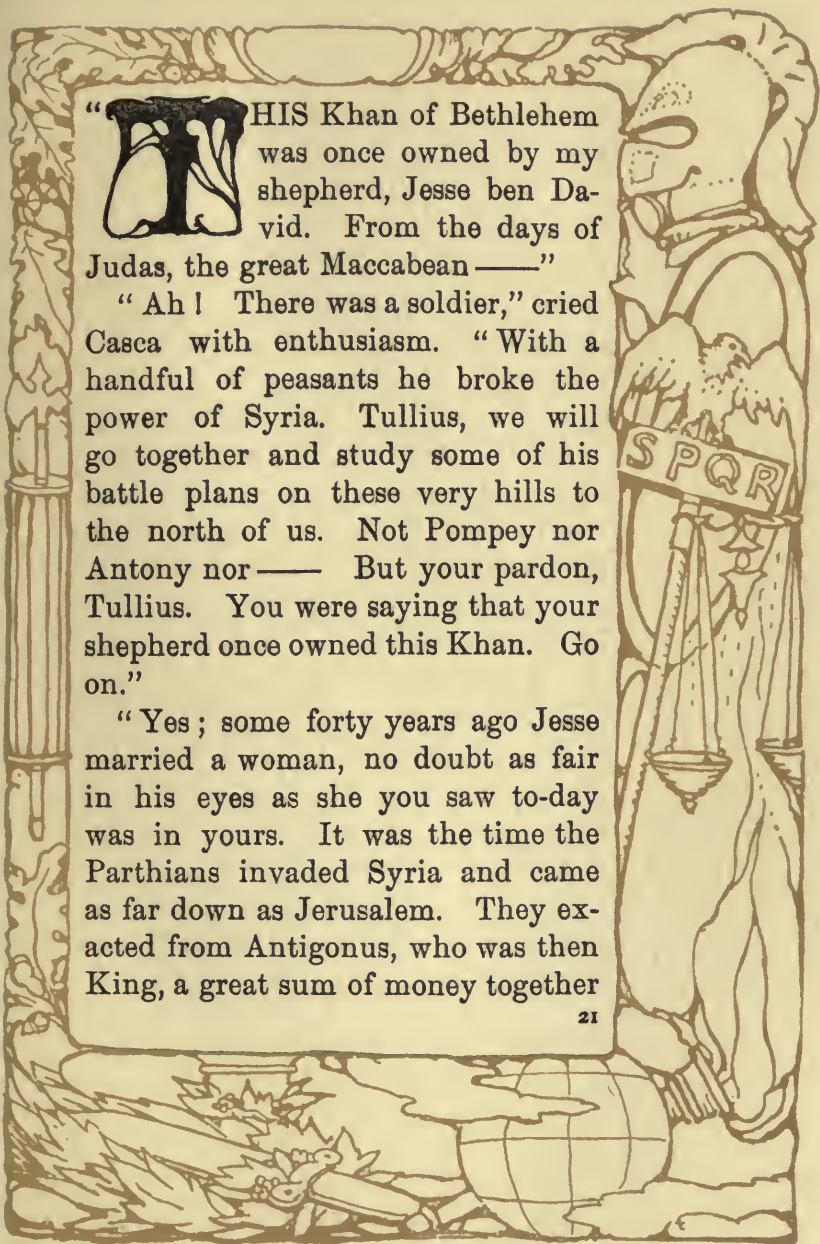
"I was made more so," said Casca, "by what I saw out there in the yard. A woman. Such a face! An old man,—her father, doubtless,—was with her. But, Tullius, if that woman had no guardian she would be safe even in a camp of Ethiopians. Milo, my man, has as little humanity in him as a leopard. He would strangle a babe as readily as



squeeze an orange ; but I found him carrying straw for the old man, and loaning him my chariot rug ; and all for the sake of getting a look at her face. When I looked at her I thought of my own mother. And I heard another say the same thing. Her face was full of motherhood ; and unless I have become untrained in such inspection, a mother she will soon be. Ah, Tullius, if Kings could be born of such women, instead of those we have to enamel into beauty, and make to look loving by pencilling their lips and their eye-brows, and give gracefulness by ——”

“Hold, Casca !” cried Tullius laughing, “or I will report to King Herod that his captain has kept guard too oft within, instead of without, the doors of his harem. You know too much of feminine arts for a soldier. Let me tell you the story of this Khan.”

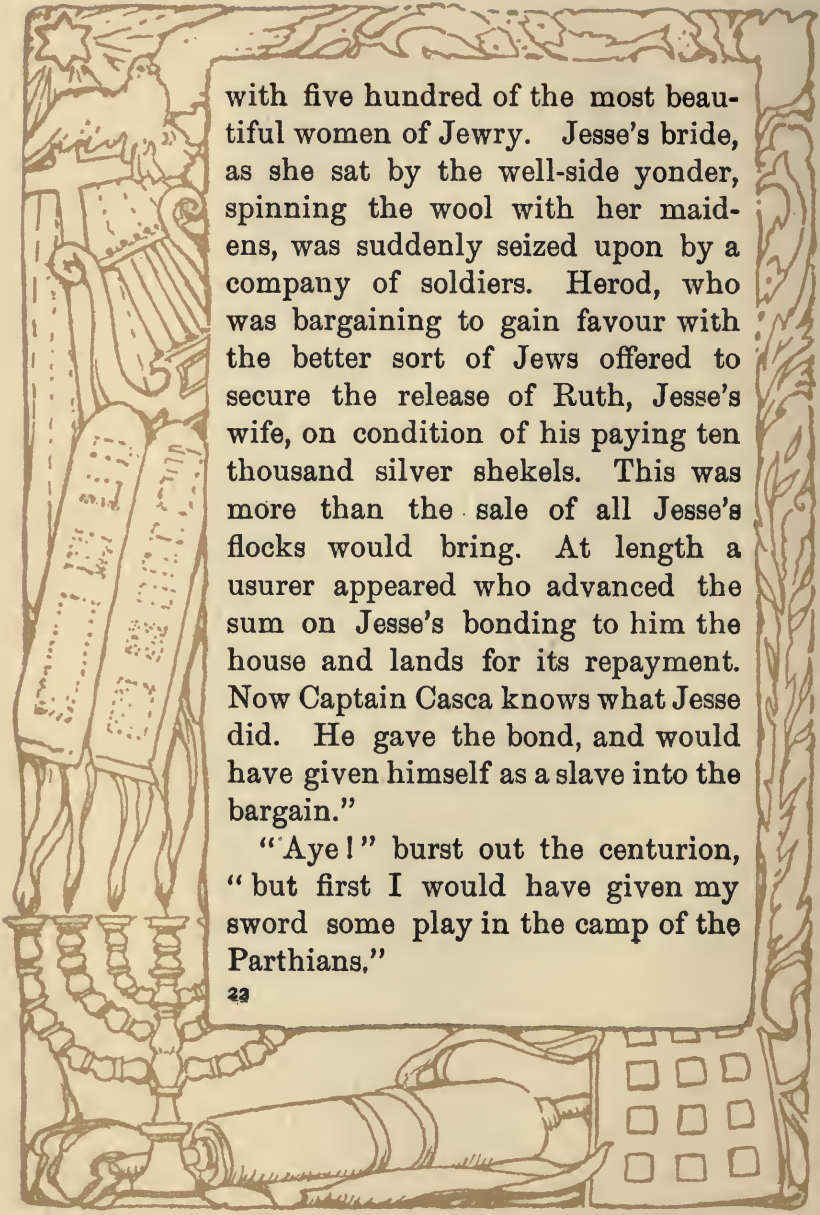




THIS Khan of Bethlehem was once owned by my shepherd, Jesse ben David. From the days of Judas, the great Maccabean ——

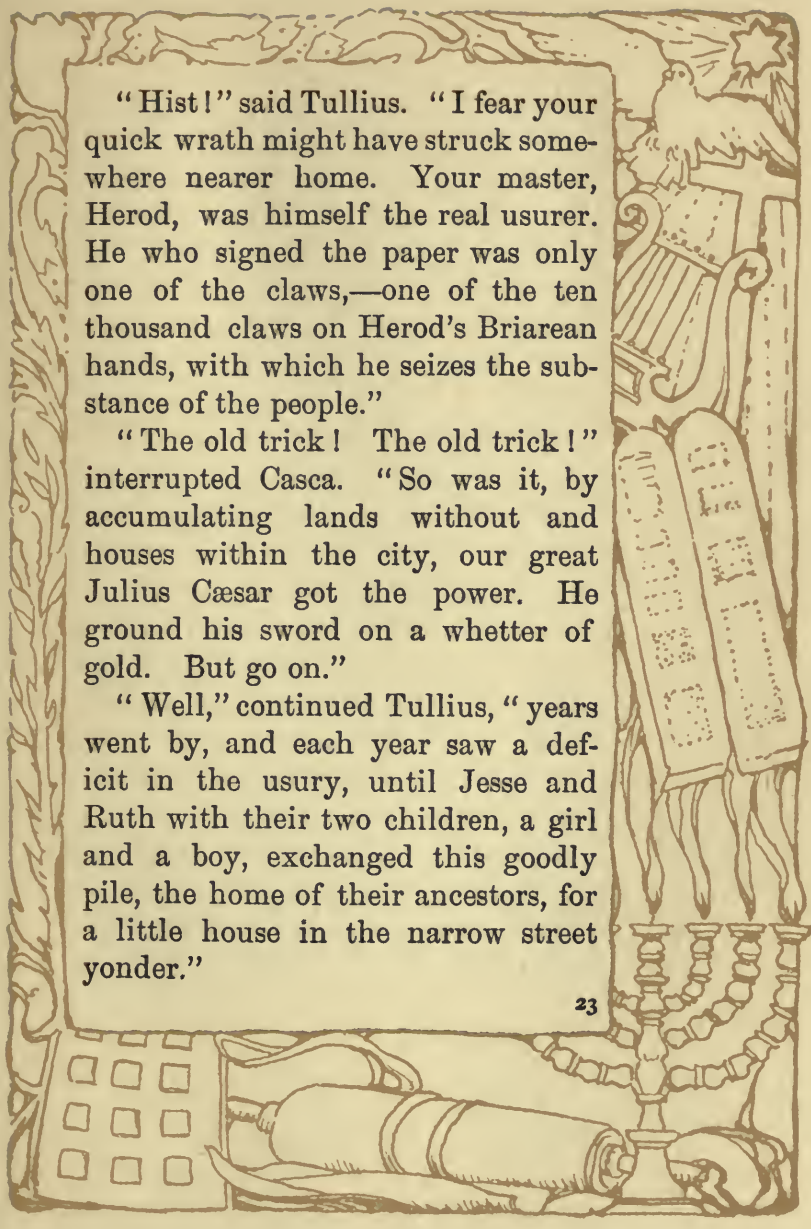
“Ah! There was a soldier,” cried Casca with enthusiasm. “With a handful of peasants he broke the power of Syria. Tullius, we will go together and study some of his battle plans on these very hills to the north of us. Not Pompey nor Antony nor —— But your pardon, Tullius. You were saying that your shepherd once owned this Khan. Go on.”

“Yes; some forty years ago Jesse married a woman, no doubt as fair in his eyes as she you saw to-day was in yours. It was the time the Parthians invaded Syria and came as far down as Jerusalem. They exacted from Antigonus, who was then King, a great sum of money together



with five hundred of the most beautiful women of Jewry. Jesse's bride, as she sat by the well-side yonder, spinning the wool with her maidens, was suddenly seized upon by a company of soldiers. Herod, who was bargaining to gain favour with the better sort of Jews offered to secure the release of Ruth, Jesse's wife, on condition of his paying ten thousand silver shekels. This was more than the sale of all Jesse's flocks would bring. At length a usurer appeared who advanced the sum on Jesse's bonding to him the house and lands for its repayment. Now Captain Casca knows what Jesse did. He gave the bond, and would have given himself as a slave into the bargain."

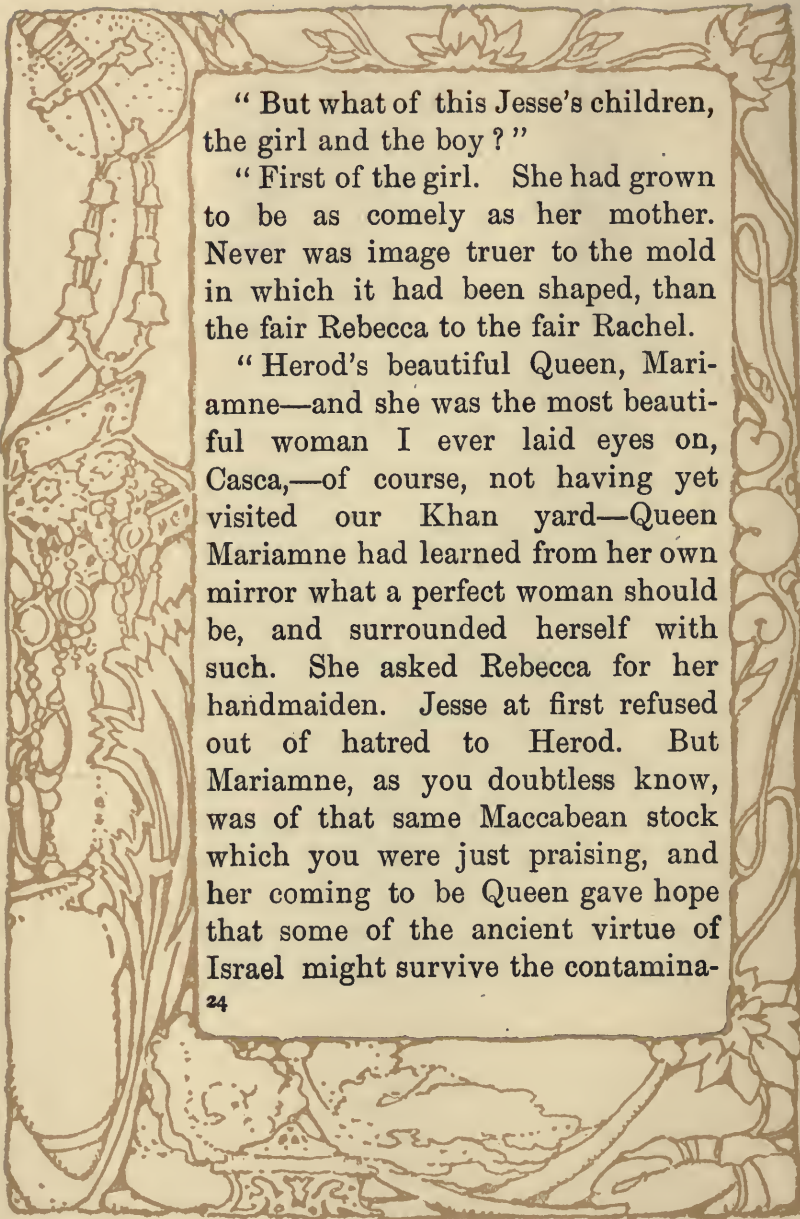
"Aye!" burst out the centurion, "but first I would have given my sword some play in the camp of the Parthians,"



"Hist!" said Tullius. "I fear your quick wrath might have struck somewhere nearer home. Your master, Herod, was himself the real usurer. He who signed the paper was only one of the claws,—one of the ten thousand claws on Herod's Briarean hands, with which he seizes the substance of the people."

"The old trick! The old trick!" interrupted Casca. "So was it, by accumulating lands without and houses within the city, our great Julius Cæsar got the power. He ground his sword on a whetter of gold. But go on."

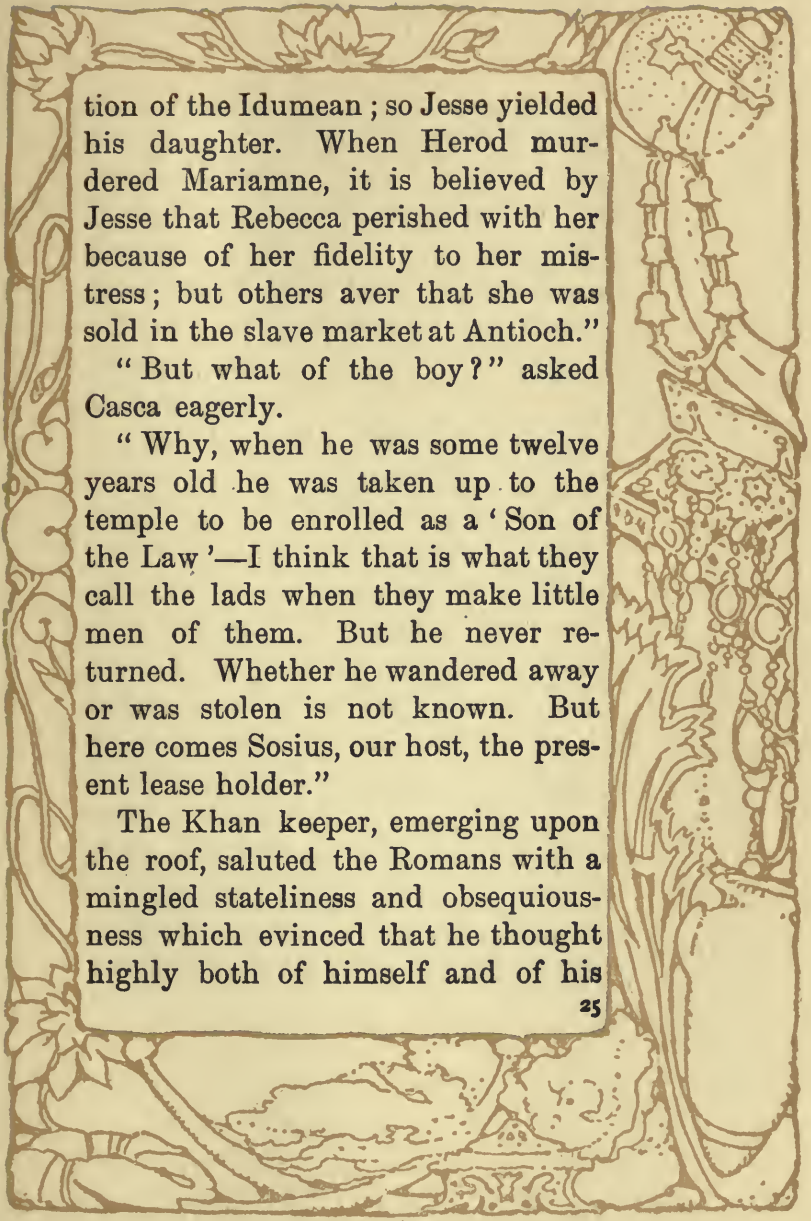
"Well," continued Tullius, "years went by, and each year saw a deficit in the usury, until Jesse and Ruth with their two children, a girl and a boy, exchanged this goodly pile, the home of their ancestors, for a little house in the narrow street yonder."



“ But what of this Jesse’s children, the girl and the boy ? ”

“ First of the girl. She had grown to be as comely as her mother. Never was image truer to the mold in which it had been shaped, than the fair Rebecca to the fair Rachel.

“ Herod’s beautiful Queen, Mariamne—and she was the most beautiful woman I ever laid eyes on, Casca,—of course, not having yet visited our Khan yard—Queen Mariamne had learned from her own mirror what a perfect woman should be, and surrounded herself with such. She asked Rebecca for her handmaiden. Jesse at first refused out of hatred to Herod. But Mariamne, as you doubtless know, was of that same Maccabean stock which you were just praising, and her coming to be Queen gave hope that some of the ancient virtue of Israel might survive the contamina-

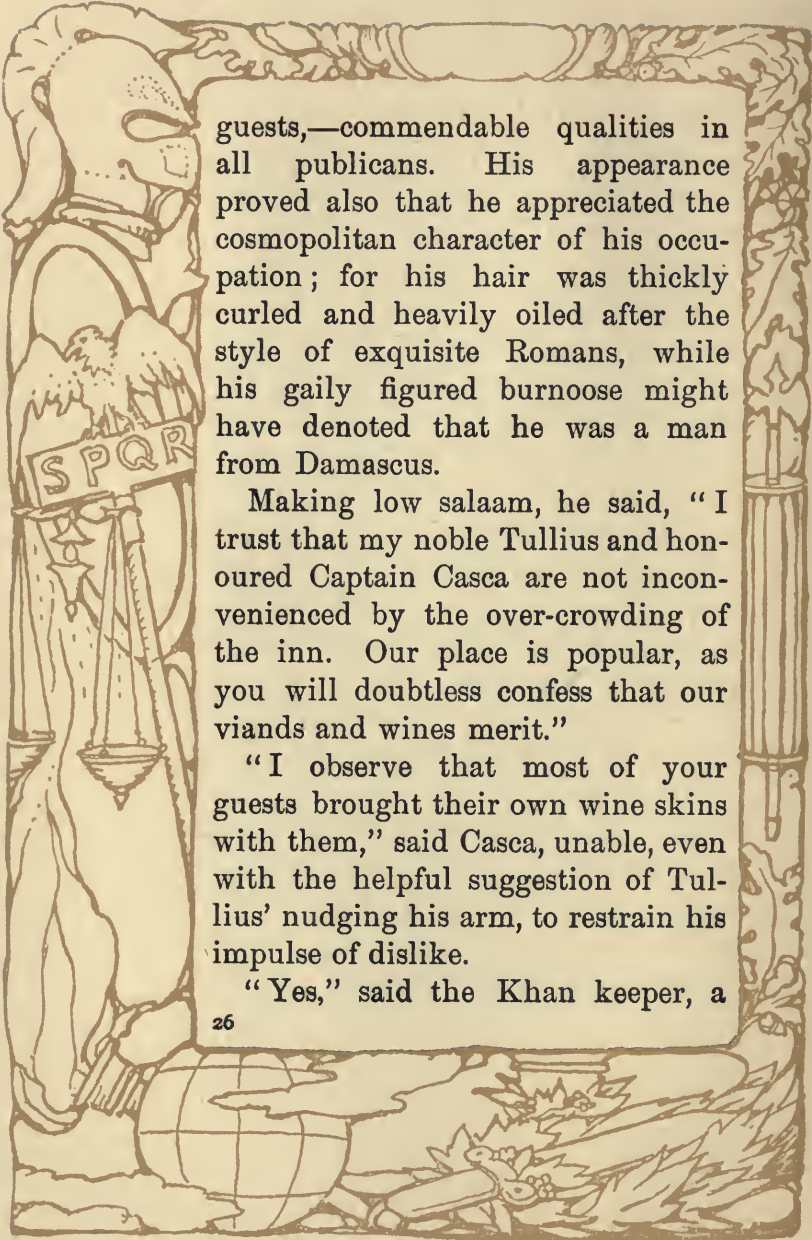


tion of the Idumean ; so Jesse yielded his daughter. When Herod murdered Mariamne, it is believed by Jesse that Rebecca perished with her because of her fidelity to her mistress ; but others aver that she was sold in the slave market at Antioch."

" But what of the boy ? " asked Casca eagerly.

" Why, when he was some twelve years old he was taken up to the temple to be enrolled as a ' Son of the Law '—I think that is what they call the lads when they make little men of them. But he never returned. Whether he wandered away or was stolen is not known. But here comes Sosius, our host, the present lease holder."

The Khan keeper, emerging upon the roof, saluted the Romans with a mingled stateliness and obsequiousness which evinced that he thought highly both of himself and of his

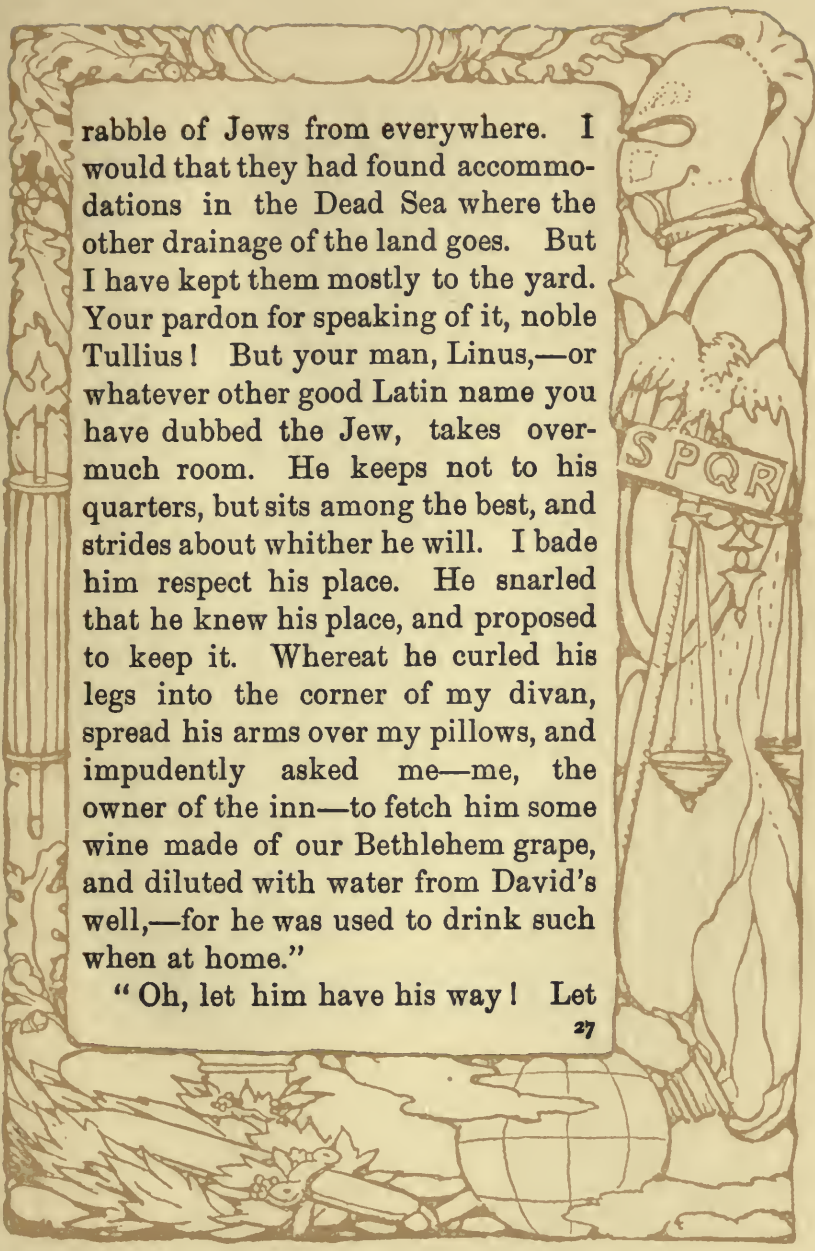


guests,—commendable qualities in all publicans. His appearance proved also that he appreciated the cosmopolitan character of his occupation; for his hair was thickly curled and heavily oiled after the style of exquisite Romans, while his gaily figured burnoose might have denoted that he was a man from Damascus.

Making low salaam, he said, "I trust that my noble Tullius and honoured Captain Casca are not inconvenienced by the over-crowding of the inn. Our place is popular, as you will doubtless confess that our viands and wines merit."

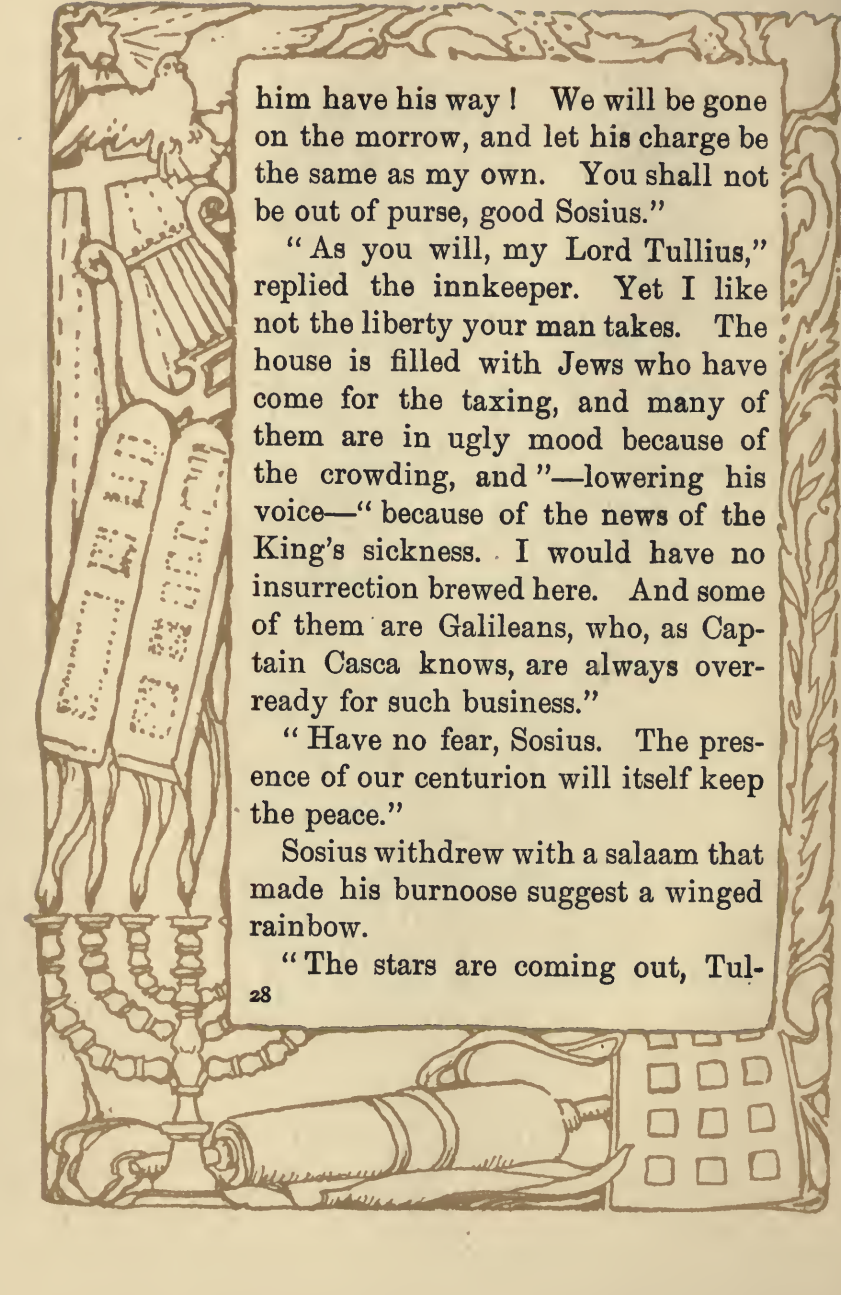
"I observe that most of your guests brought their own wine skins with them," said Casca, unable, even with the helpful suggestion of Tullius' nudging his arm, to restrain his impulse of dislike.

"Yes," said the Khan keeper, a

A decorative border surrounds the text. On the right side, a classical figure, possibly a personification of Justice or a deity, stands holding a scale of justice. The figure wears a helmet and a garment with the letters 'SPQR' on it. At the bottom center, a globe is depicted. The left side of the border features a stylized column or torch.

rabble of Jews from everywhere. I would that they had found accommodations in the Dead Sea where the other drainage of the land goes. But I have kept them mostly to the yard. Your pardon for speaking of it, noble Tullius! But your man, Linus,—or whatever other good Latin name you have dubbed the Jew, takes over-much room. He keeps not to his quarters, but sits among the best, and strides about whither he will. I bade him respect his place. He snarled that he knew his place, and proposed to keep it. Whereat he curled his legs into the corner of my divan, spread his arms over my pillows, and impudently asked me—me, the owner of the inn—to fetch him some wine made of our Bethlehem grape, and diluted with water from David's well,—for he was used to drink such when at home.”

“ Oh, let him have his way! Let



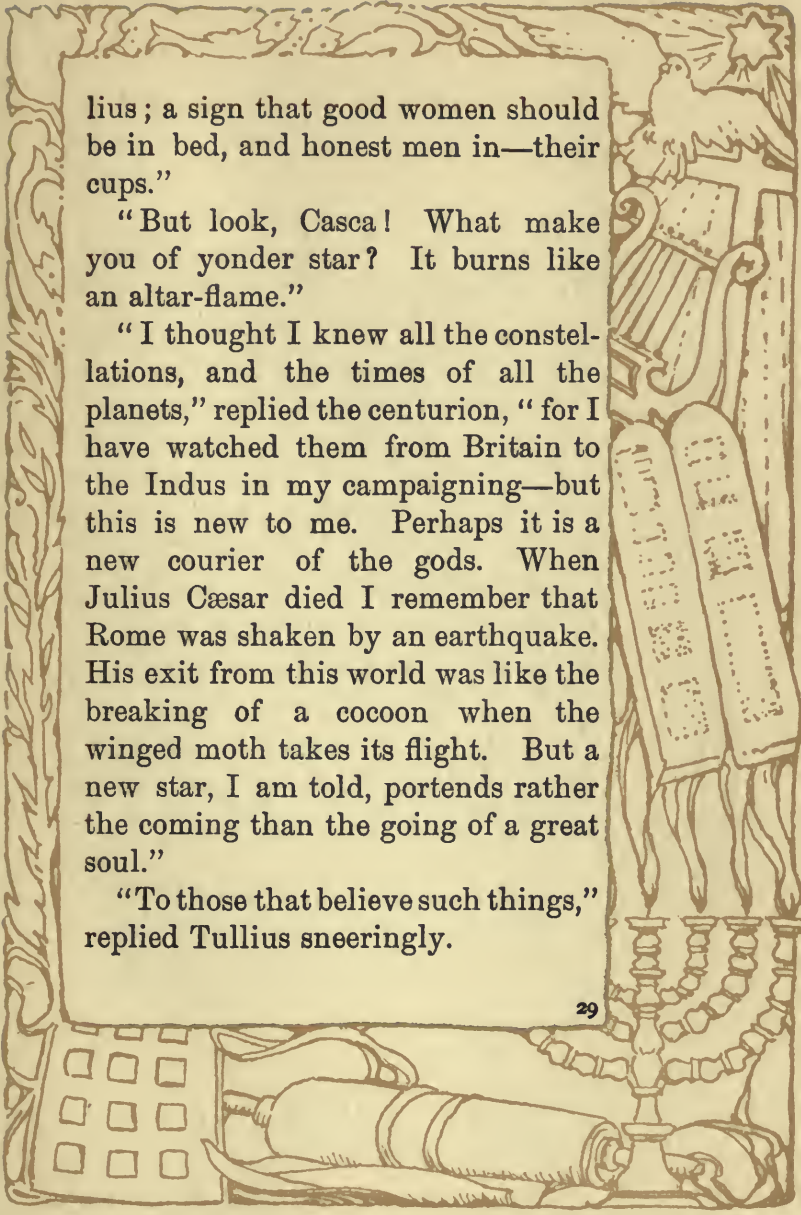
him have his way ! We will be gone on the morrow, and let his charge be the same as my own. You shall not be out of purse, good Sosius."

"As you will, my Lord Tullius," replied the innkeeper. Yet I like not the liberty your man takes. The house is filled with Jews who have come for the taxing, and many of them are in ugly mood because of the crowding, and"—lowering his voice—"because of the news of the King's sickness. I would have no insurrection brewed here. And some of them are Galileans, who, as Captain Casca knows, are always over-ready for such business."

"Have no fear, Sosius. The presence of our centurion will itself keep the peace."

Sosius withdrew with a salaam that made his burnoose suggest a winged rainbow.

"The stars are coming out, Tul-

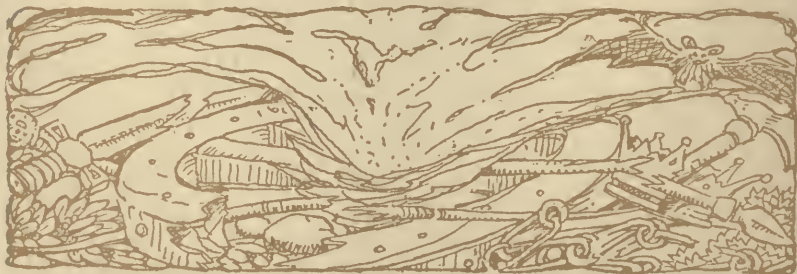


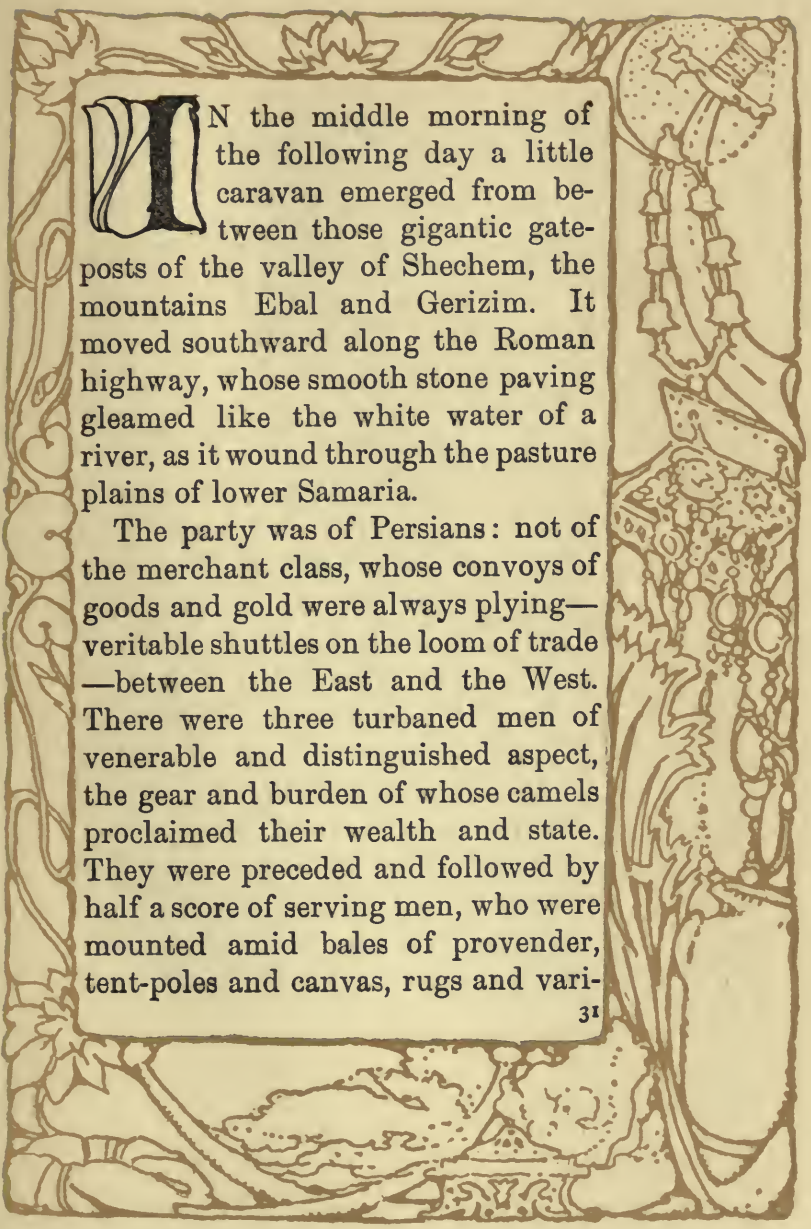
lius ; a sign that good women should be in bed, and honest men in—their cups.”

“But look, Casca! What make you of yonder star? It burns like an altar-flame.”

“I thought I knew all the constellations, and the times of all the planets,” replied the centurion, “for I have watched them from Britain to the Indus in my campaigning—but this is new to me. Perhaps it is a new courier of the gods. When Julius Cæsar died I remember that Rome was shaken by an earthquake. His exit from this world was like the breaking of a cocoon when the winged moth takes its flight. But a new star, I am told, portends rather the coming than the going of a great soul.”

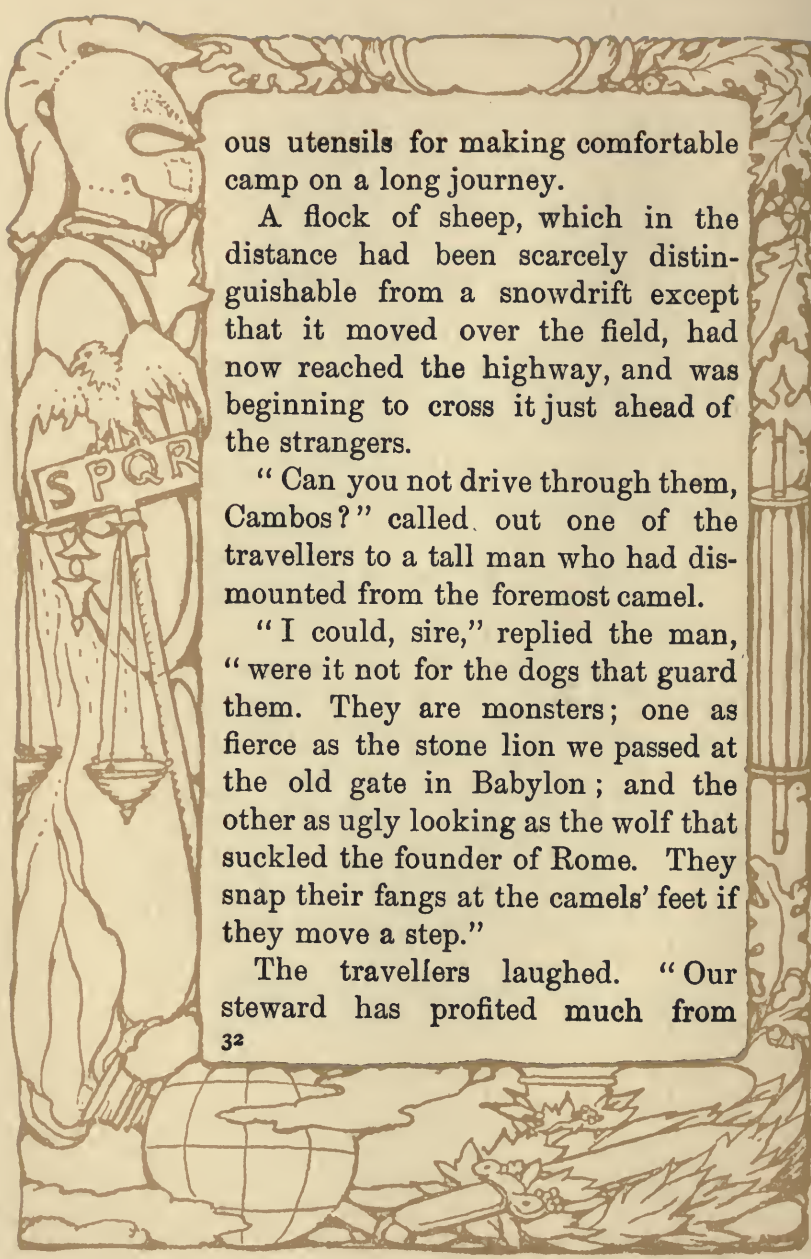
“To those that believe such things,” replied Tullius sneeringly.





IN the middle morning of the following day a little caravan emerged from between those gigantic gateposts of the valley of Shechem, the mountains Ebal and Gerizim. It moved southward along the Roman highway, whose smooth stone paving gleamed like the white water of a river, as it wound through the pasture plains of lower Samaria.

The party was of Persians: not of the merchant class, whose convoys of goods and gold were always plying—veritable shuttles on the loom of trade—between the East and the West. There were three turbaned men of venerable and distinguished aspect, the gear and burden of whose camels proclaimed their wealth and state. They were preceded and followed by half a score of serving men, who were mounted amid bales of provender, tent-poles and canvas, rugs and vari-



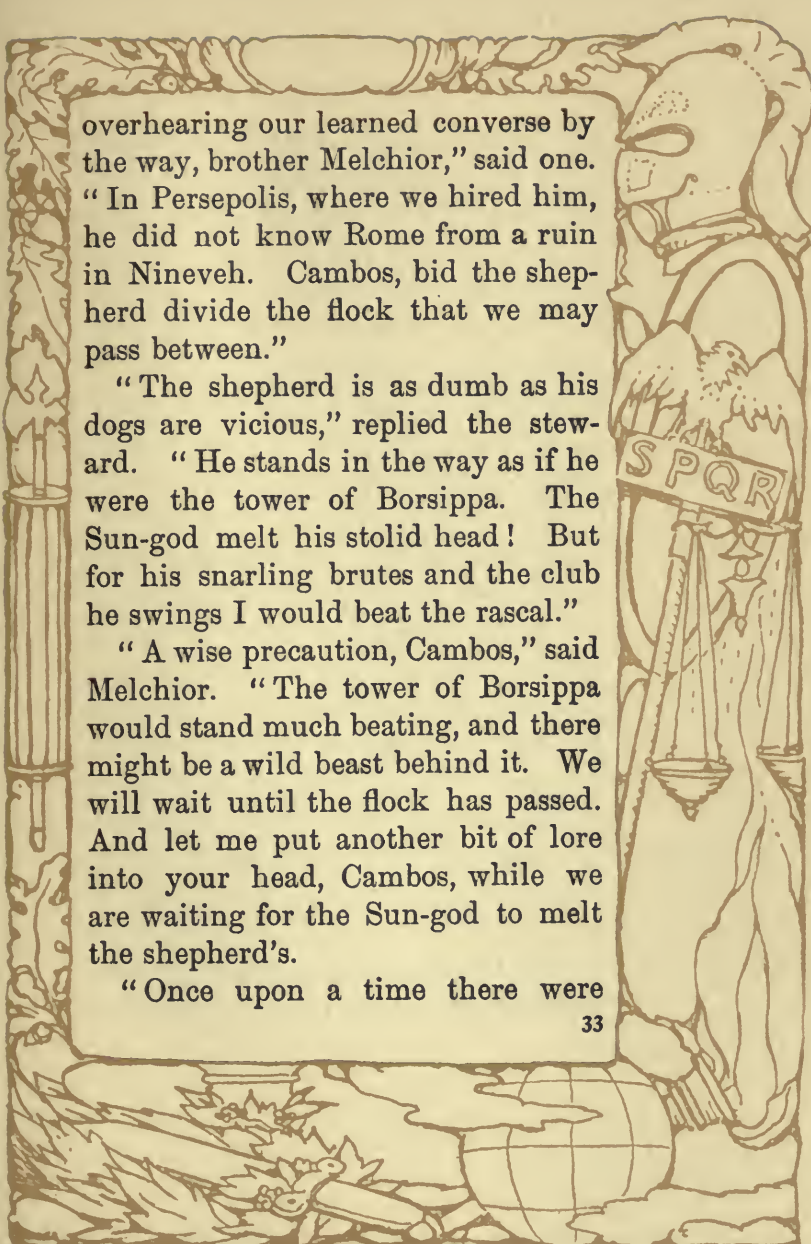
ous utensils for making comfortable camp on a long journey.

A flock of sheep, which in the distance had been scarcely distinguishable from a snowdrift except that it moved over the field, had now reached the highway, and was beginning to cross it just ahead of the strangers.

"Can you not drive through them, Cambos?" called out one of the travellers to a tall man who had dismounted from the foremost camel.

"I could, sire," replied the man, "were it not for the dogs that guard them. They are monsters; one as fierce as the stone lion we passed at the old gate in Babylon; and the other as ugly looking as the wolf that suckled the founder of Rome. They snap their fangs at the camels' feet if they move a step."

The travellers laughed. "Our steward has profited much from




overhearing our learned converse by the way, brother Melchior," said one. "In Persepolis, where we hired him, he did not know Rome from a ruin in Nineveh. Cambos, bid the shepherd divide the flock that we may pass between."

"The shepherd is as dumb as his dogs are vicious," replied the steward. "He stands in the way as if he were the tower of Borsippa. The Sun-god melt his stolid head! But for his snarling brutes and the club he swings I would beat the rascal."

"A wise precaution, Cambos," said Melchior. "The tower of Borsippa would stand much beating, and there might be a wild beast behind it. We will wait until the flock has passed. And let me put another bit of lore into your head, Cambos, while we are waiting for the Sun-god to melt the shepherd's."

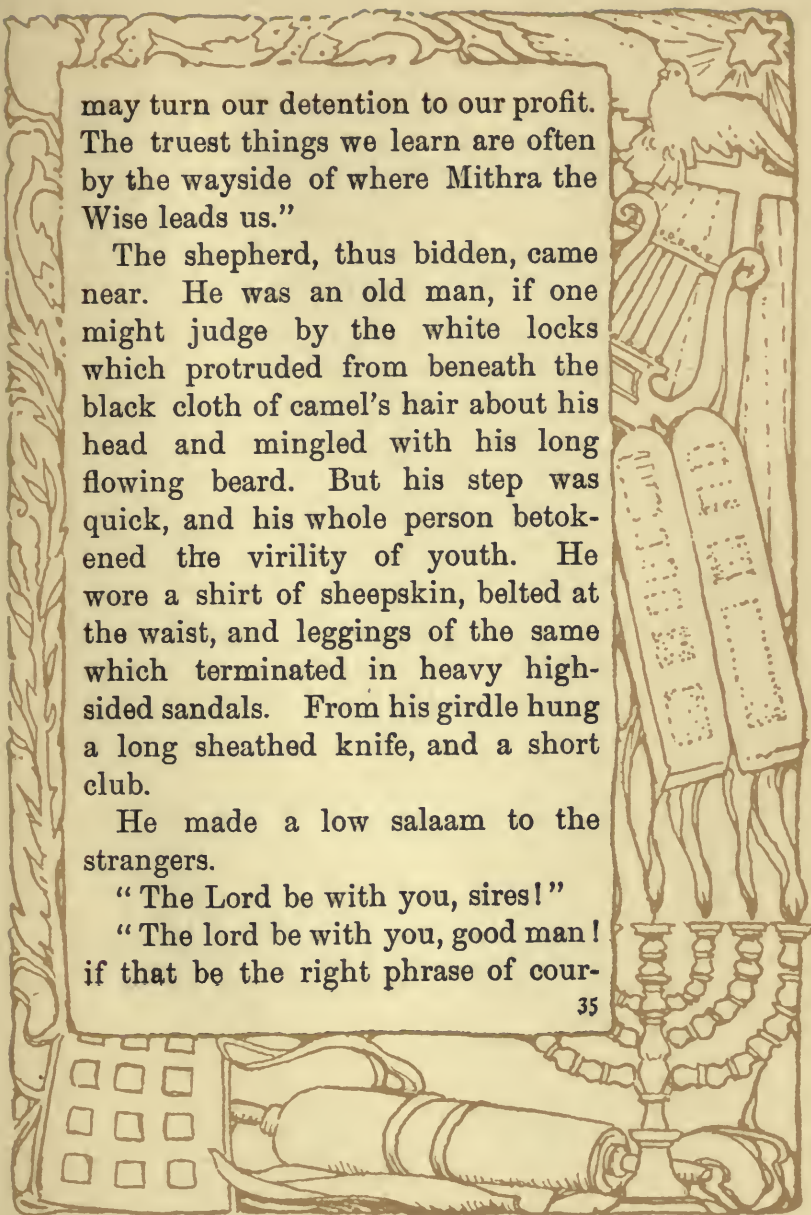
"Once upon a time there were



Shepherd-Kings from somewhere hereabouts whose clubs became sceptres, for they crossed the great desert and conquered Egypt. Was it not so, Balthazar?"

"Yes," replied his companion. "If my memory plays me true, the great Ramses who built the pyramids was one of those Shepherd-Kings, or sprung from their loins."

"There was still one greater than he, as wisdom is mightier than strength," added Gaspar, the third of the masters. "In the sacred rolls of the Jews, which was found in the palace at Babylon, where it had been kept since the days of our great King Cyrus the Mede, I read of one Moses, a shepherd of Midian, who gave laws to this Jewish people. More weighted with wisdom were the precepts of this teacher than the laws of Hammurabi. Let Cambos bid the shepherd come to us. We



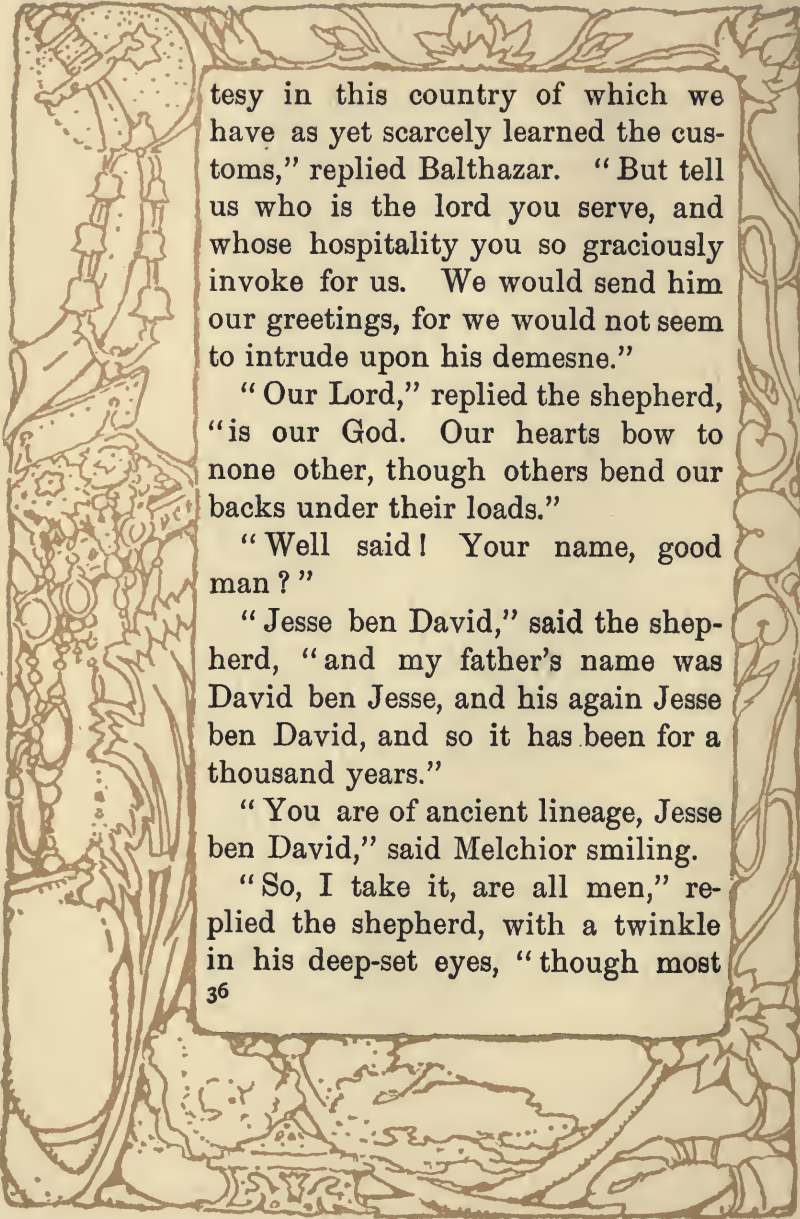
may turn our detention to our profit. The truest things we learn are often by the wayside of where Mithra the Wise leads us."

The shepherd, thus bidden, came near. He was an old man, if one might judge by the white locks which protruded from beneath the black cloth of camel's hair about his head and mingled with his long flowing beard. But his step was quick, and his whole person betokened the virility of youth. He wore a shirt of sheepskin, belted at the waist, and leggings of the same which terminated in heavy high-sided sandals. From his girdle hung a long sheathed knife, and a short club.

He made a low salaam to the strangers.

"The Lord be with you, sires!"

"The lord be with you, good man! if that be the right phrase of cour-



tesy in this country of which we have as yet scarcely learned the customs," replied Balthazar. "But tell us who is the lord you serve, and whose hospitality you so graciously invoke for us. We would send him our greetings, for we would not seem to intrude upon his demesne."

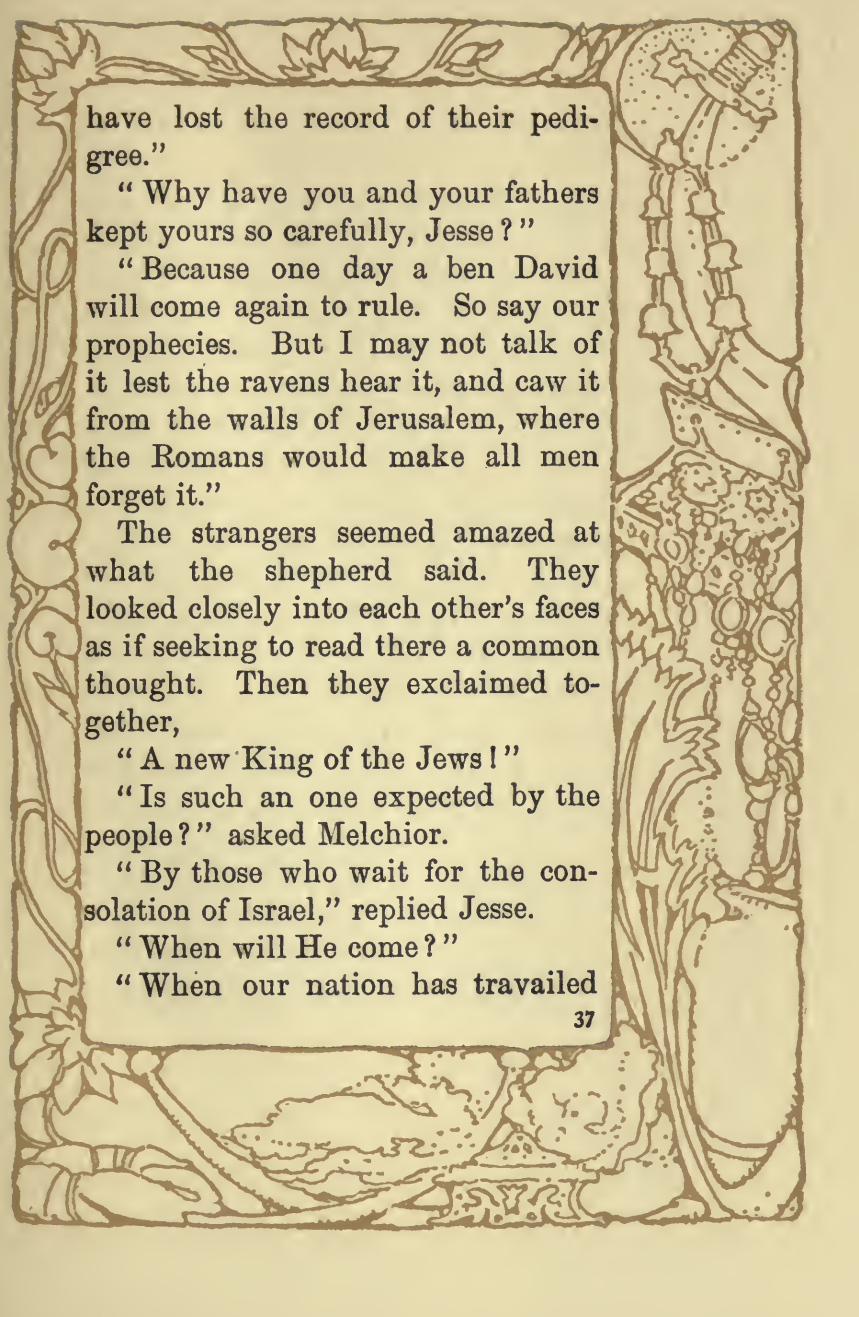
"Our Lord," replied the shepherd, "is our God. Our hearts bow to none other, though others bend our backs under their loads."

"Well said! Your name, good man?"

"Jesse ben David," said the shepherd, "and my father's name was David ben Jesse, and his again Jesse ben David, and so it has been for a thousand years."

"You are of ancient lineage, Jesse ben David," said Melchior smiling.

"So, I take it, are all men," replied the shepherd, with a twinkle in his deep-set eyes, "though most



have lost the record of their pedigree."

"Why have you and your fathers kept yours so carefully, Jesse?"

"Because one day a ben David will come again to rule. So say our prophecies. But I may not talk of it lest the ravens hear it, and caw it from the walls of Jerusalem, where the Romans would make all men forget it."

The strangers seemed amazed at what the shepherd said. They looked closely into each other's faces as if seeking to read there a common thought. Then they exclaimed together,

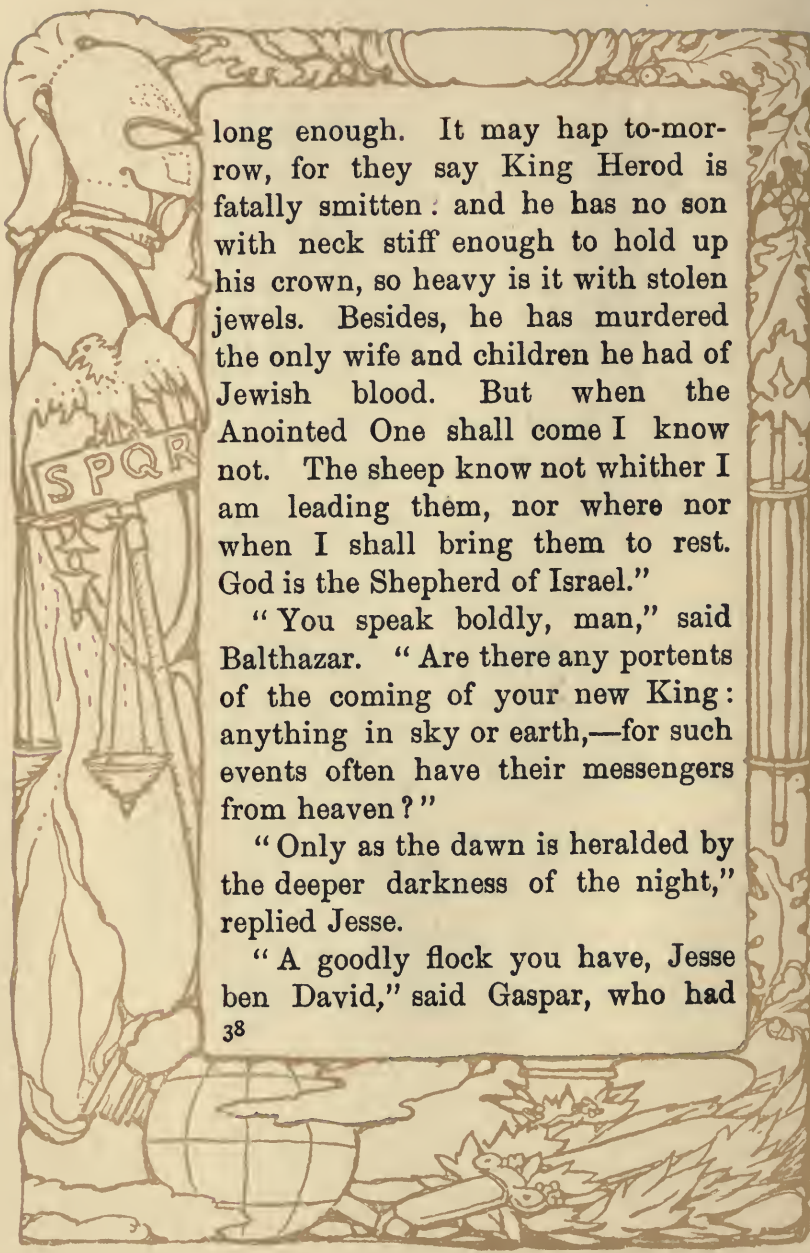
"A new King of the Jews!"

"Is such an one expected by the people?" asked Melchior.

"By those who wait for the consolation of Israel," replied Jesse.

"When will He come?"

"When our nation has travailed

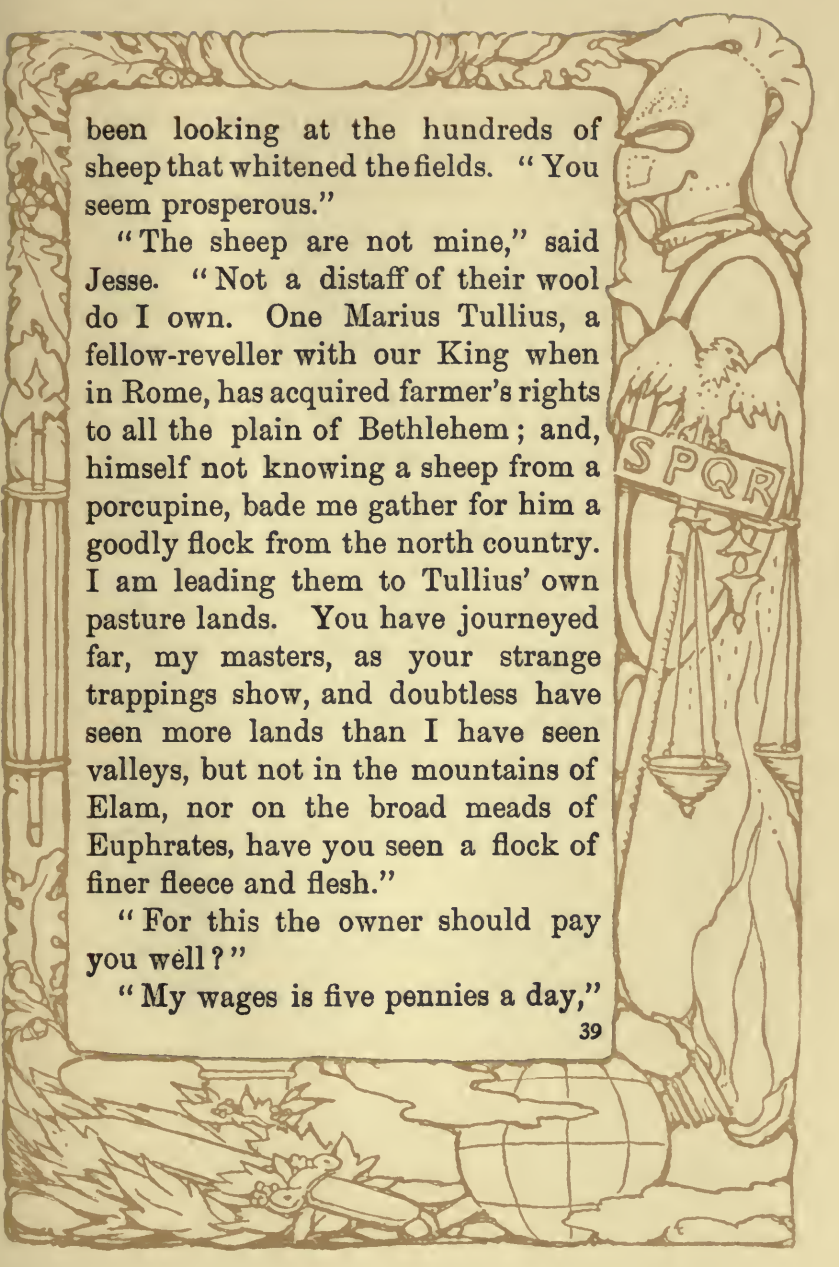


long enough. It may hap to-mor-row, for they say King Herod is fatally smitten : and he has no son with neck stiff enough to hold up his crown, so heavy is it with stolen jewels. Besides, he has murdered the only wife and children he had of Jewish blood. But when the Anointed One shall come I know not. The sheep know not whither I am leading them, nor where nor when I shall bring them to rest. God is the Shepherd of Israel."

"You speak boldly, man," said Balthazar. "Are there any portents of the coming of your new King : anything in sky or earth,—for such events often have their messengers from heaven?"

"Only as the dawn is heralded by the deeper darkness of the night," replied Jesse.

"A goodly flock you have, Jesse ben David," said Gaspar, who had

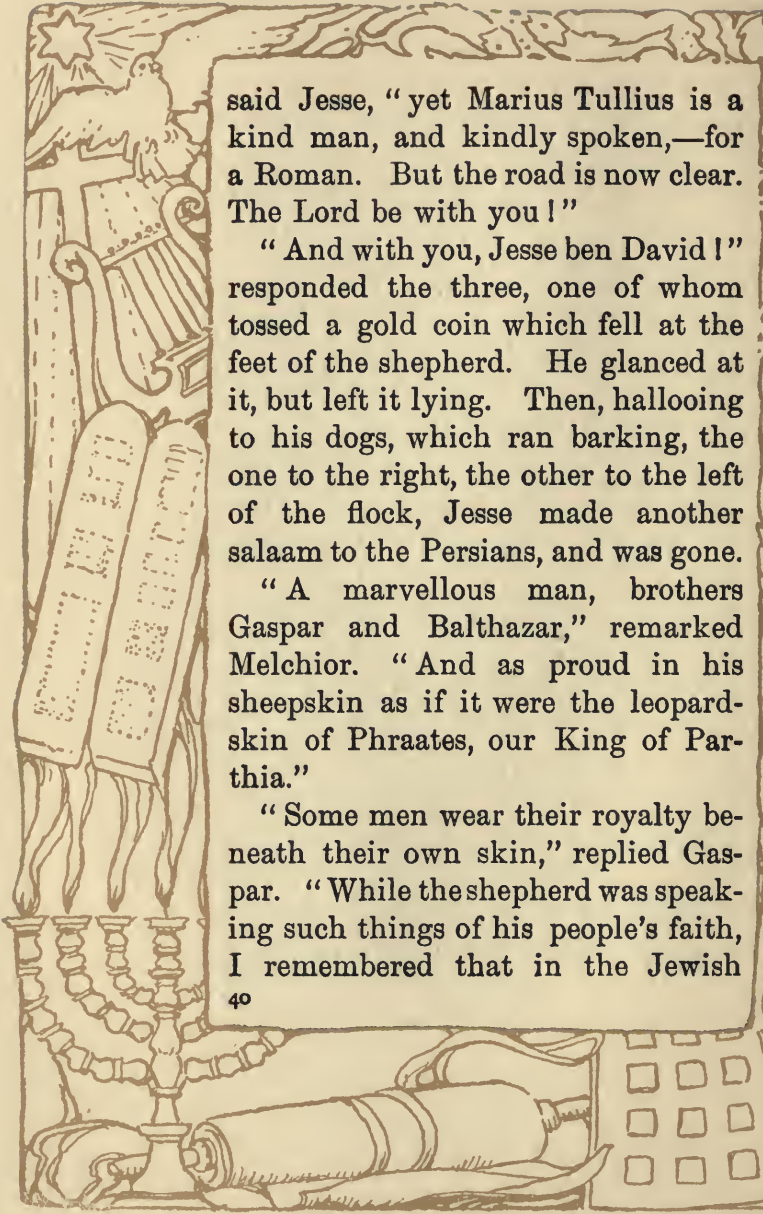
A decorative border surrounds the text. On the right side, there is a classical figure, possibly a personification of Justice or a deity, wearing a helmet and holding a shield with the letters 'SPQR' on it. At the bottom, there is a globe and some foliage.

been looking at the hundreds of sheep that whitened the fields. "You seem prosperous."

"The sheep are not mine," said Jesse. "Not a distaff of their wool do I own. One Marius Tullius, a fellow-reveller with our King when in Rome, has acquired farmer's rights to all the plain of Bethlehem; and, himself not knowing a sheep from a porcupine, bade me gather for him a goodly flock from the north country. I am leading them to Tullius' own pasture lands. You have journeyed far, my masters, as your strange trappings show, and doubtless have seen more lands than I have seen valleys, but not in the mountains of Elam, nor on the broad meads of Euphrates, have you seen a flock of finer fleece and flesh."

"For this the owner should pay you well?"

"My wages is five pennies a day,"



said Jesse, "yet Marius Tullius is a kind man, and kindly spoken,—for a Roman. But the road is now clear. The Lord be with you!"

"And with you, Jesse ben David!" responded the three, one of whom tossed a gold coin which fell at the feet of the shepherd. He glanced at it, but left it lying. Then, hallooing to his dogs, which ran barking, the one to the right, the other to the left of the flock, Jesse made another salaam to the Persians, and was gone.

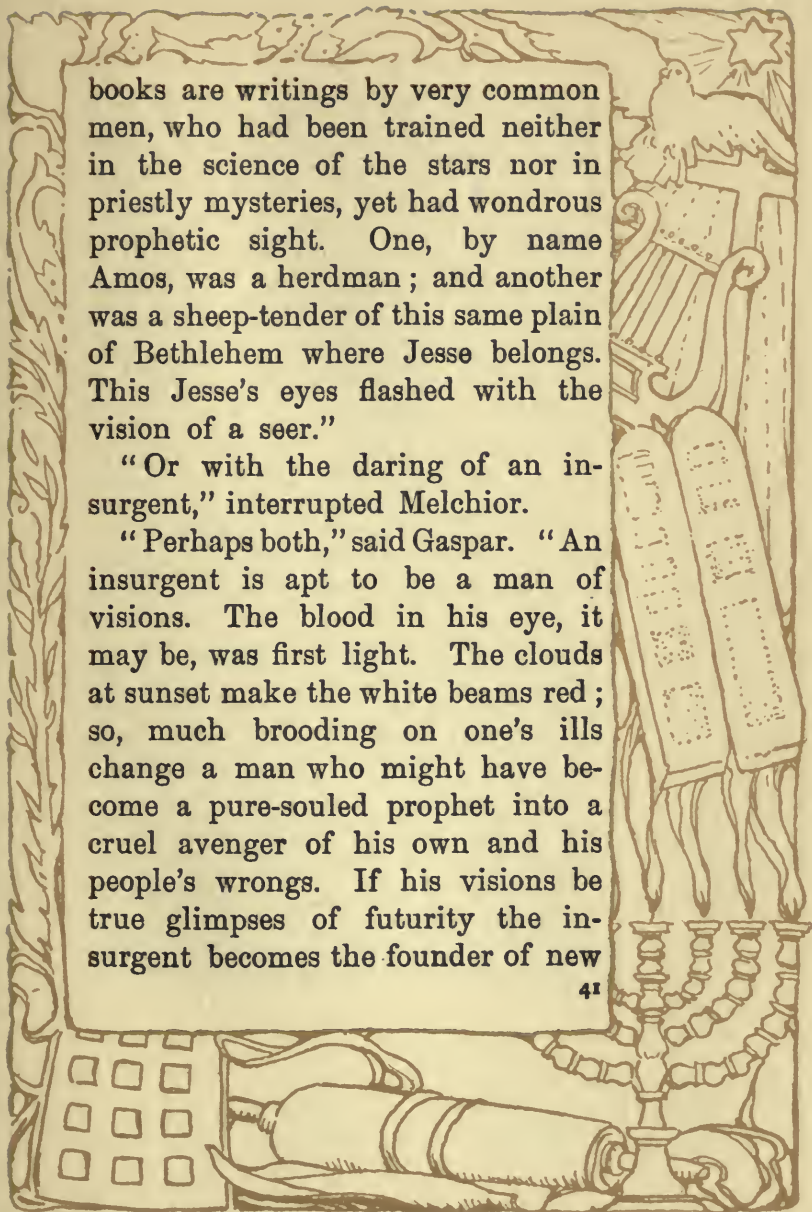
"A marvellous man, brothers Gaspar and Balthazar," remarked Melchior. "And as proud in his sheepskin as if it were the leopard-skin of Phraates, our King of Parthia."

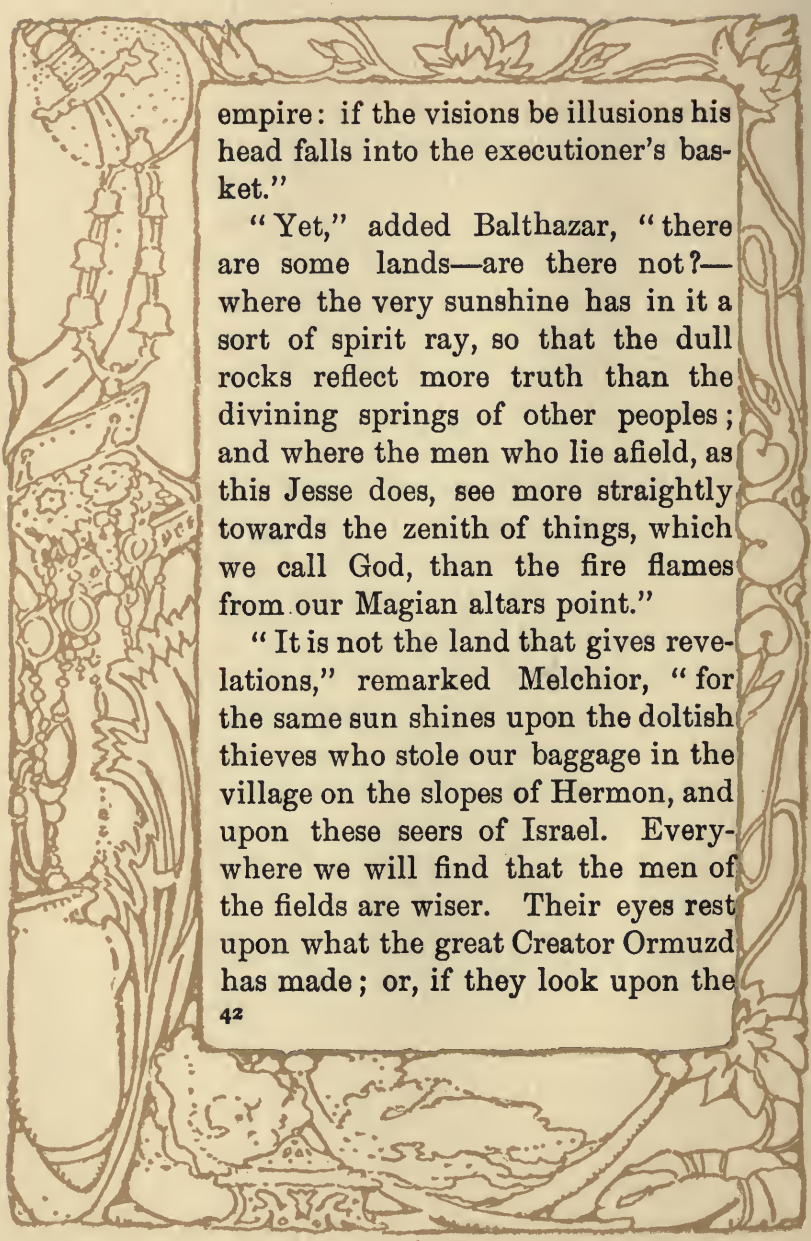
"Some men wear their royalty beneath their own skin," replied Gaspar. "While the shepherd was speaking such things of his people's faith, I remembered that in the Jewish

books are writings by very common men, who had been trained neither in the science of the stars nor in priestly mysteries, yet had wondrous prophetic sight. One, by name Amos, was a herdman ; and another was a sheep-tender of this same plain of Bethlehem where Jesse belongs. This Jesse's eyes flashed with the vision of a seer."

"Or with the daring of an insurgent," interrupted Melchior.

"Perhaps both," said Gaspar. "An insurgent is apt to be a man of visions. The blood in his eye, it may be, was first light. The clouds at sunset make the white beams red ; so, much brooding on one's ills change a man who might have become a pure-souled prophet into a cruel avenger of his own and his people's wrongs. If his visions be true glimpses of futurity the insurgent becomes the founder of new





empire: if the visions be illusions his head falls into the executioner's basket."

"Yet," added Balthazar, "there are some lands—are there not?—where the very sunshine has in it a sort of spirit ray, so that the dull rocks reflect more truth than the divining springs of other peoples; and where the men who lie afield, as this Jesse does, see more straightly towards the zenith of things, which we call God, than the fire flames from our Magian altars point."

"It is not the land that gives revelations," remarked Melchior, "for the same sun shines upon the doltish thieves who stole our baggage in the village on the slopes of Hermon, and upon these seers of Israel. Everywhere we will find that the men of the fields are wiser. Their eyes rest upon what the great Creator Ormuzd has made; or, if they look upon the

abodes of men, they see them from so far a distance that their minds are undiverted by the wranglings of the mart, the silly babblings of fashion, or ——”

“Or the contentions of those who esteem themselves wise, which are often more fatal to clear thinking,” interjected Balthazar. “Therefore, we who are denied the quiet of the shepherd’s life build us high towers, that in the upper silence we may listen to what the stars speak to one another in their nightly assemblies. How else could Mithra, the god of deep revealings, have foretaught us what this shepherd has told us of the coming of the new King of the Jews?”





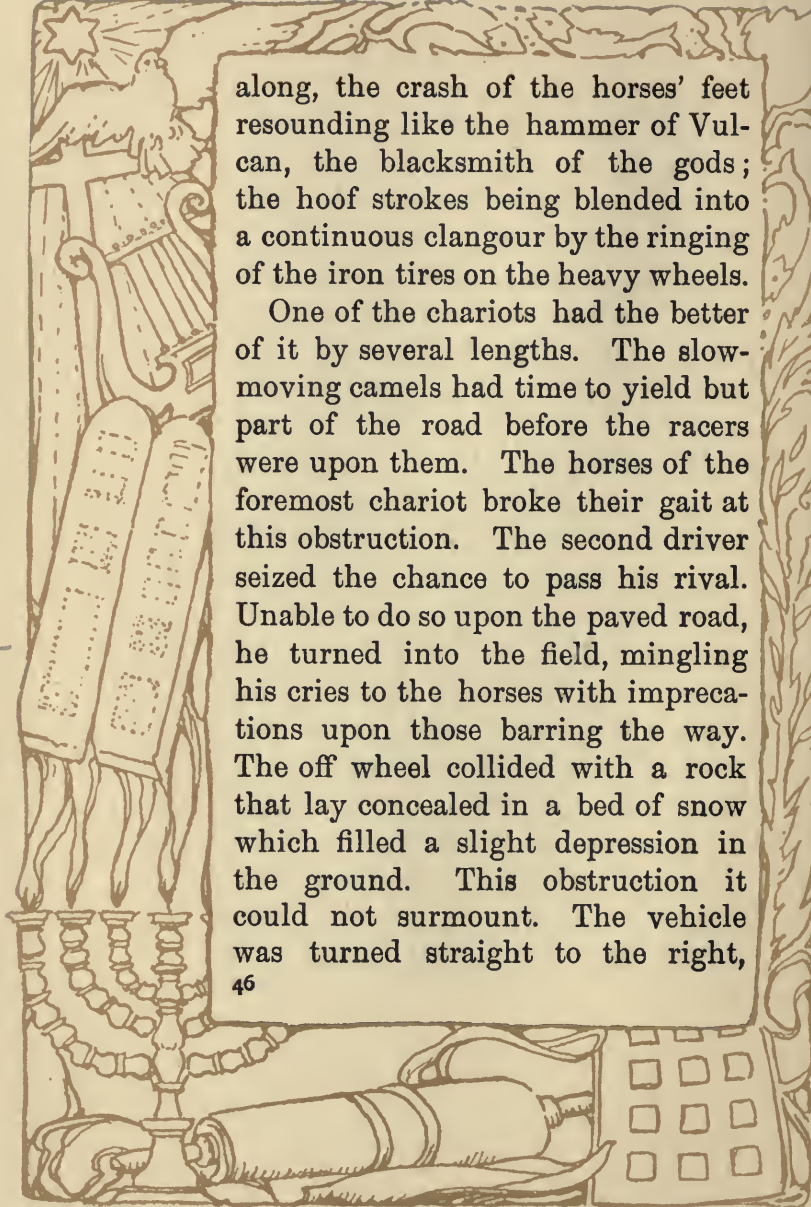


THIS high discourse of the Wise Men was rudely interrupted by a sudden clatter upon the highway to the south of them. They heard the sharp click of horses' hoofs upon the stones, and the excited outcries of men. Two chariots, the low flooring of which almost scraped the smooth pavement, drawn each by four horses abreast, were approaching at furious speed. In each were two men, one of whom held the reins while the other goaded the steeds.

"Clear the way! Clear the way!" they shouted. It was evidently a race, such as occurred almost daily upon the highway, where Roman cavalrymen speeded their beasts, and nabobs from everywhere showed the length of their purses by the blood of the horses they were able to purchase.

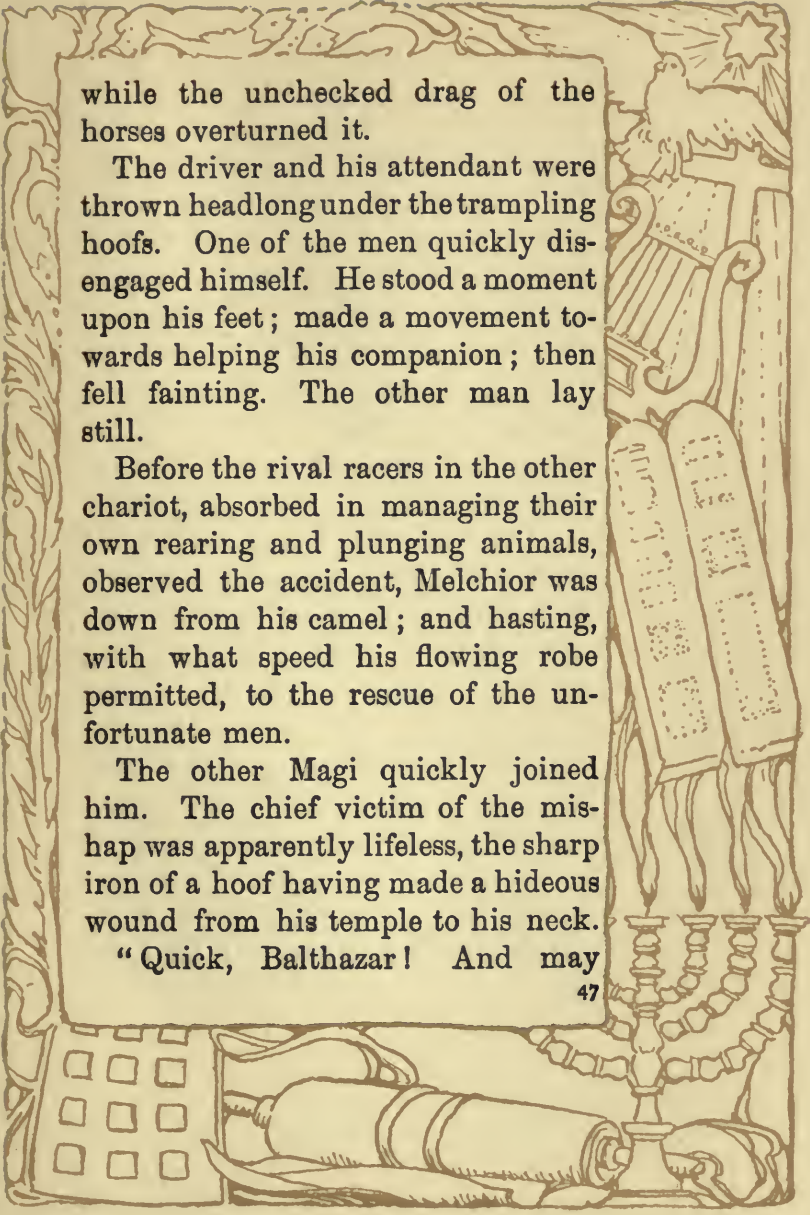
The two chariots came thundering





along, the crash of the horses' feet
resounding like the hammer of Vul-
can, the blacksmith of the gods ;
the hoof strokes being blended into
a continuous clangour by the ringing
of the iron tires on the heavy wheels.

One of the chariots had the better
of it by several lengths. The slow-
moving camels had time to yield but
part of the road before the racers
were upon them. The horses of the
foremost chariot broke their gait at
this obstruction. The second driver
seized the chance to pass his rival.
Unable to do so upon the paved road,
he turned into the field, mingling
his cries to the horses with imprecations upon those barring the way.
The off wheel collided with a rock
that lay concealed in a bed of snow
which filled a slight depression in
the ground. This obstruction it
could not surmount. The vehicle
was turned straight to the right,



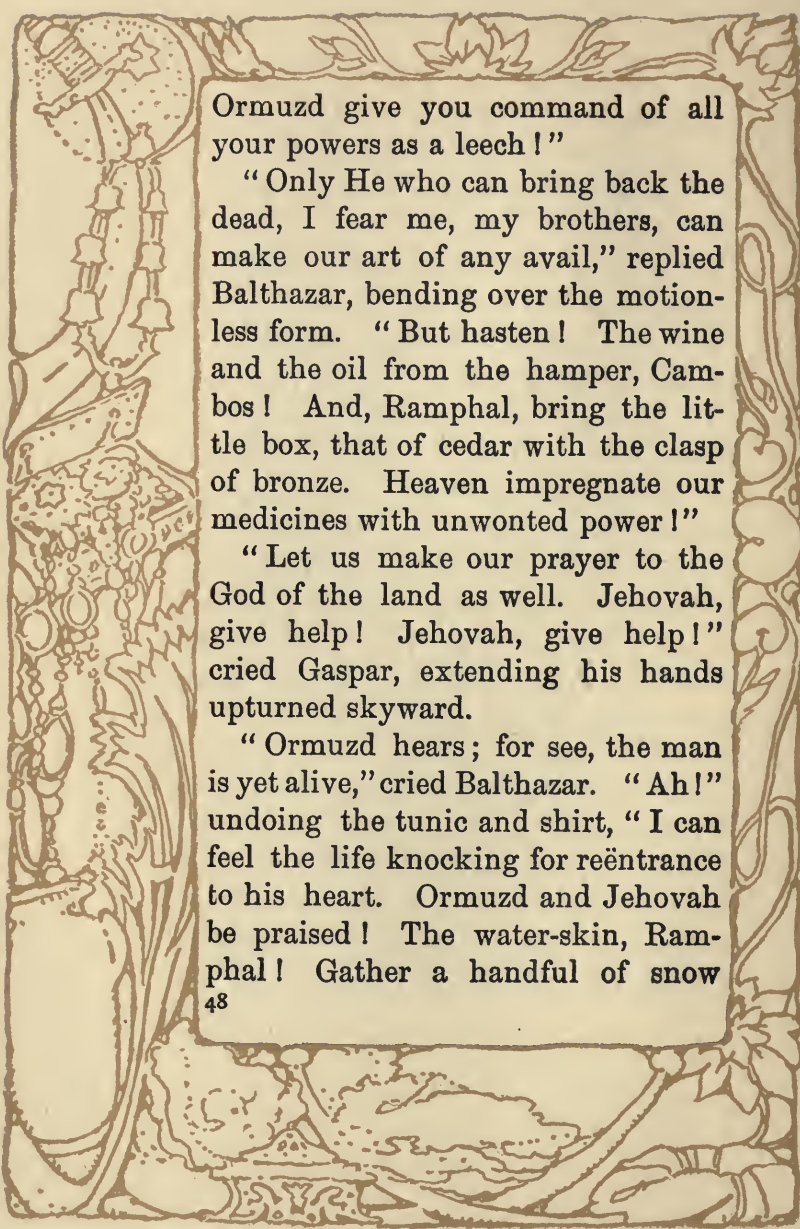
while the unchecked drag of the horses overturned it.

The driver and his attendant were thrown headlong under the trampling hoofs. One of the men quickly disengaged himself. He stood a moment upon his feet; made a movement towards helping his companion; then fell fainting. The other man lay still.

Before the rival racers in the other chariot, absorbed in managing their own rearing and plunging animals, observed the accident, Melchior was down from his camel; and hasting, with what speed his flowing robe permitted, to the rescue of the unfortunate men.

The other Magi quickly joined him. The chief victim of the mishap was apparently lifeless, the sharp iron of a hoof having made a hideous wound from his temple to his neck.

“Quick, Balthazar! And may

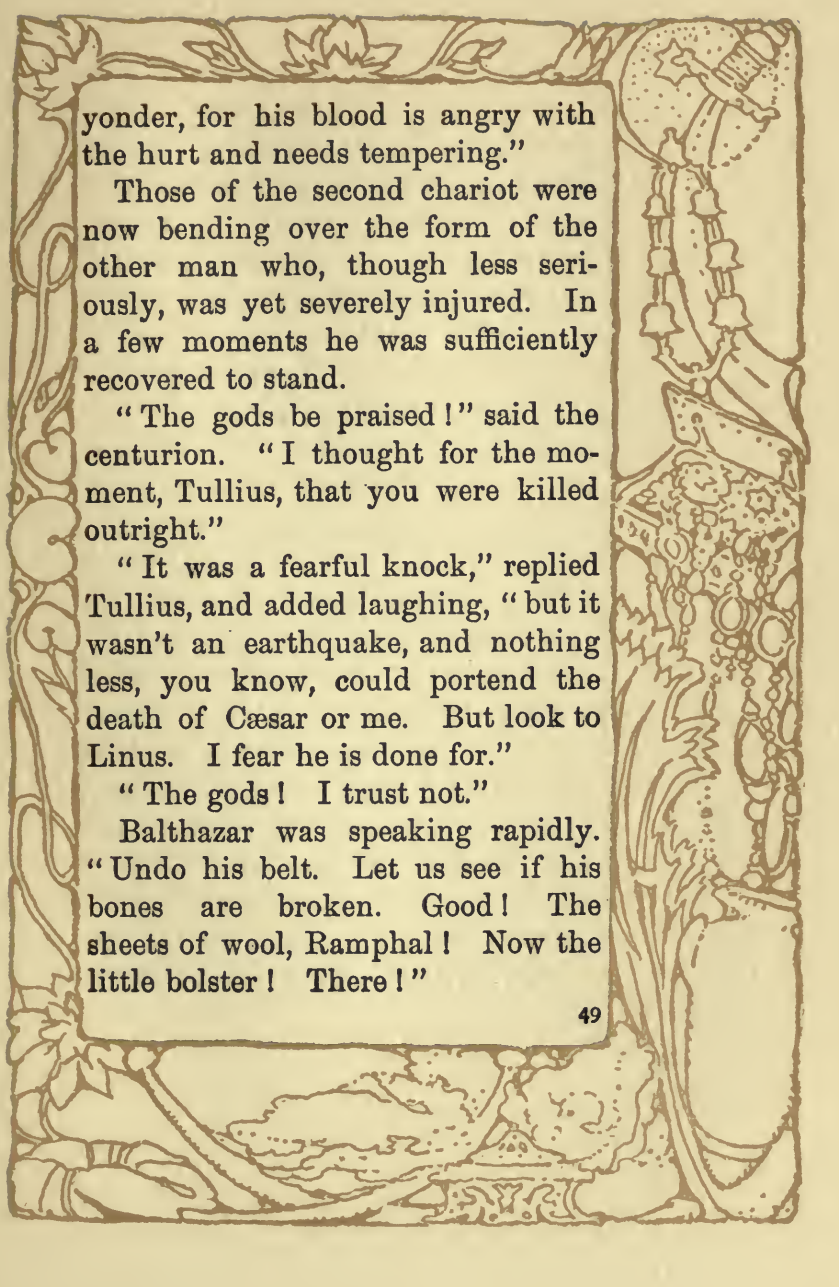


Ormuzd give you command of all your powers as a leech ! ”

“ Only He who can bring back the dead, I fear me, my brothers, can make our art of any avail,” replied Balthazar, bending over the motionless form. “ But hasten ! The wine and the oil from the hamper, Cambos ! And, Ramphal, bring the little box, that of cedar with the clasp of bronze. Heaven impregnate our medicines with unwonted power ! ”

“ Let us make our prayer to the God of the land as well. Jehovah, give help ! Jehovah, give help ! ” cried Gaspar, extending his hands upturned skyward.

“ Ormuzd hears ; for see, the man is yet alive,” cried Balthazar. “ Ah ! ” undoing the tunic and shirt, “ I can feel the life knocking for reëntrance to his heart. Ormuzd and Jehovah be praised ! The water-skin, Ramphal ! Gather a handful of snow



yonder, for his blood is angry with the hurt and needs tempering."

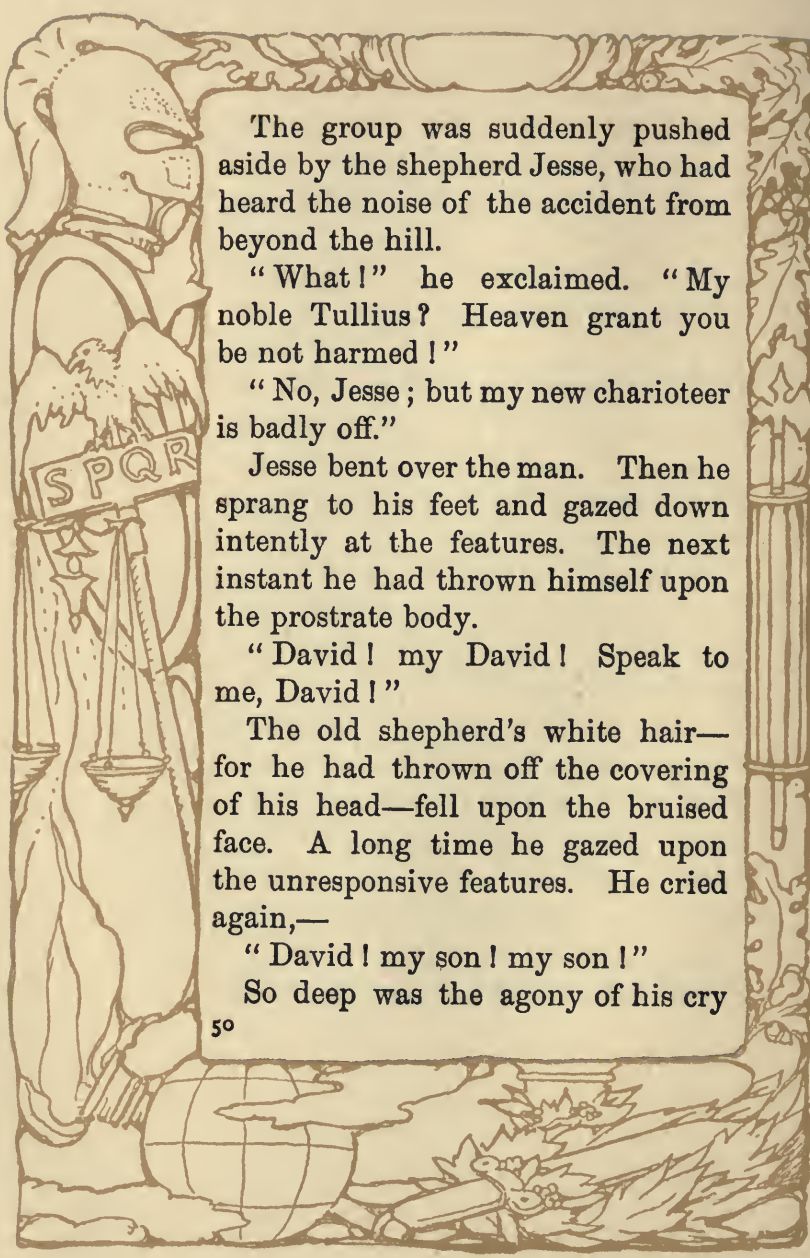
Those of the second chariot were now bending over the form of the other man who, though less seriously, was yet severely injured. In a few moments he was sufficiently recovered to stand.

"The gods be praised!" said the centurion. "I thought for the moment, Tullius, that you were killed outright."

"It was a fearful knock," replied Tullius, and added laughing, "but it wasn't an earthquake, and nothing less, you know, could portend the death of Cæsar or me. But look to Linus. I fear he is done for."

"The gods! I trust not."

Balthazar was speaking rapidly. "Undo his belt. Let us see if his bones are broken. Good! The sheets of wool, Ramphal! Now the little bolster! There!"



The group was suddenly pushed aside by the shepherd Jesse, who had heard the noise of the accident from beyond the hill.

"What!" he exclaimed. "My noble Tullius? Heaven grant you be not harmed!"

"No, Jesse; but my new charioteer is badly off."

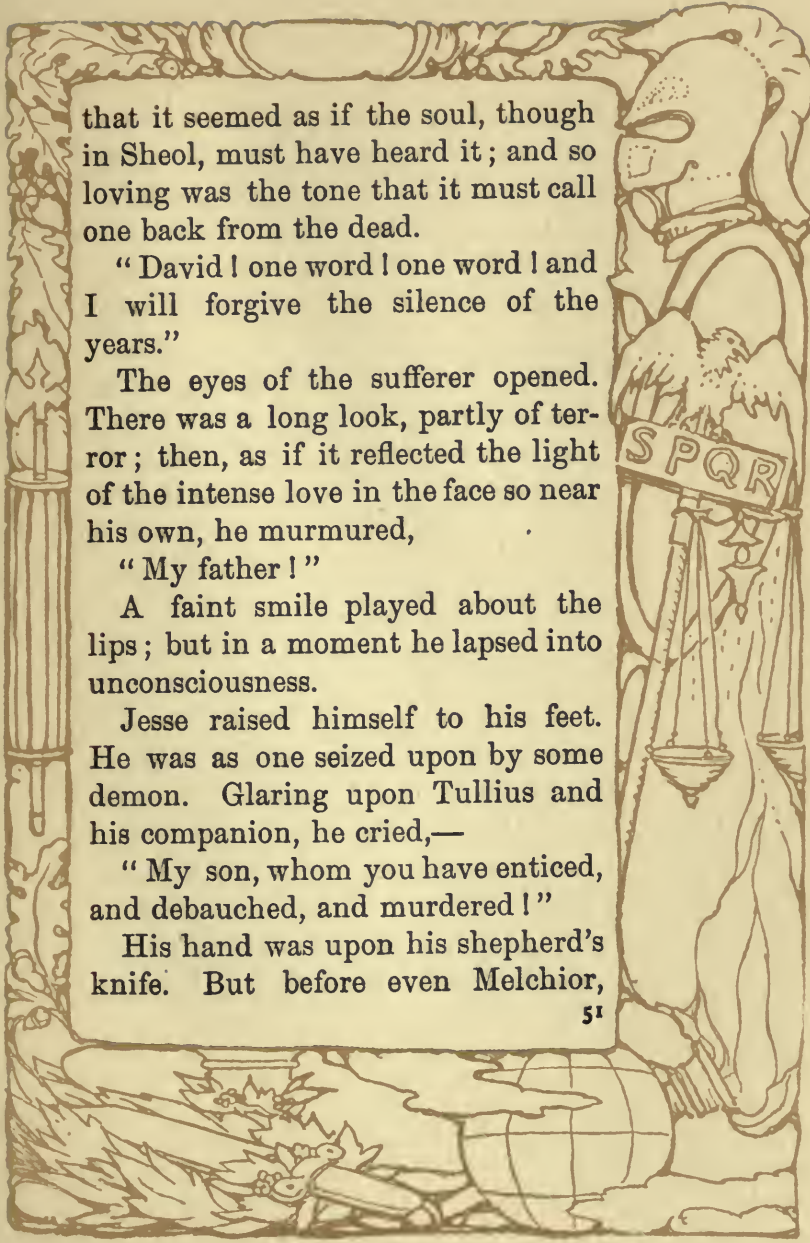
Jesse bent over the man. Then he sprang to his feet and gazed down intently at the features. The next instant he had thrown himself upon the prostrate body.

"David! my David! Speak to me, David!"

The old shepherd's white hair—for he had thrown off the covering of his head—fell upon the bruised face. A long time he gazed upon the unresponsive features. He cried again,—

"David! my son! my son!"

So deep was the agony of his cry



that it seemed as if the soul, though in Sheol, must have heard it; and so loving was the tone that it must call one back from the dead.

“David! one word! one word! and I will forgive the silence of the years.”

The eyes of the sufferer opened. There was a long look, partly of terror; then, as if it reflected the light of the intense love in the face so near his own, he murmured,

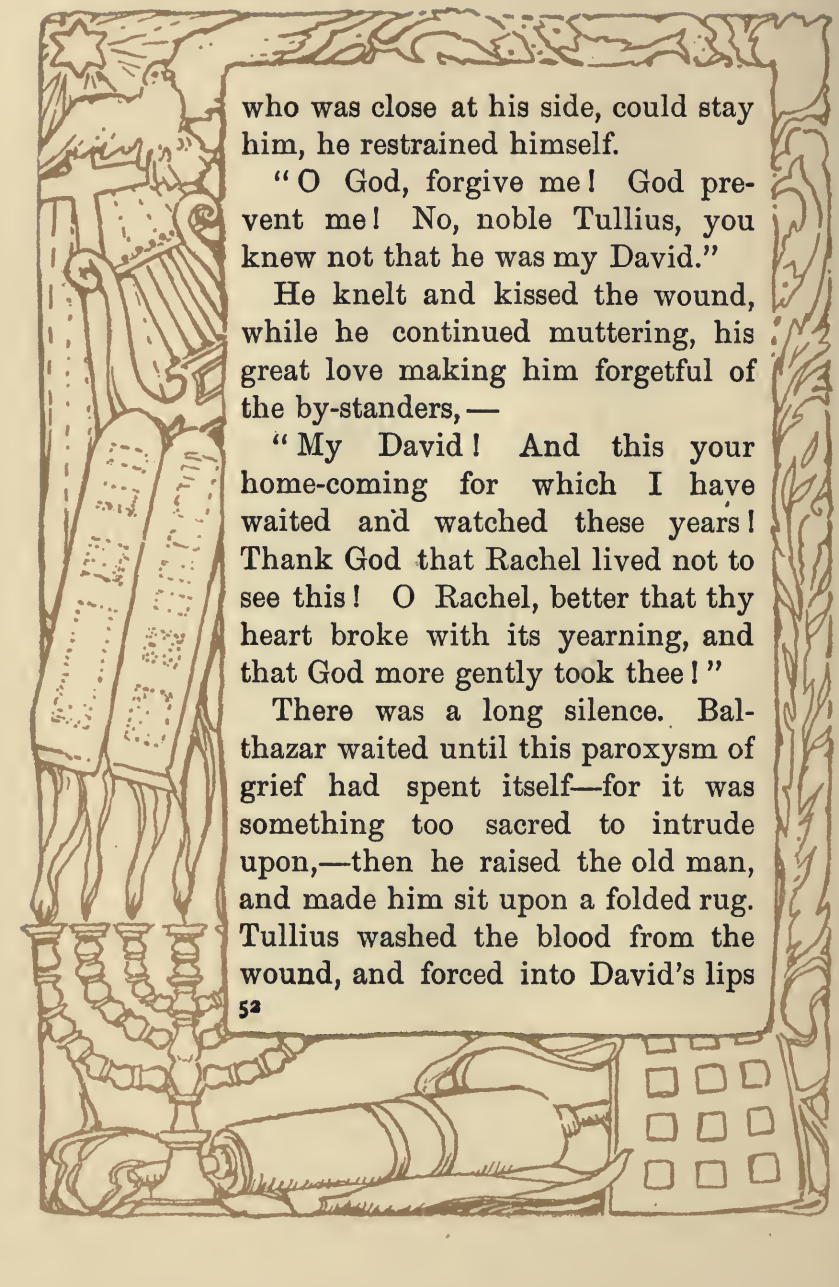
“My father!”

A faint smile played about the lips; but in a moment he lapsed into unconsciousness.

Jesse raised himself to his feet. He was as one seized upon by some demon. Glaring upon Tullius and his companion, he cried,—

“My son, whom you have enticed, and debauched, and murdered!”

His hand was upon his shepherd's knife. But before even Melchior,



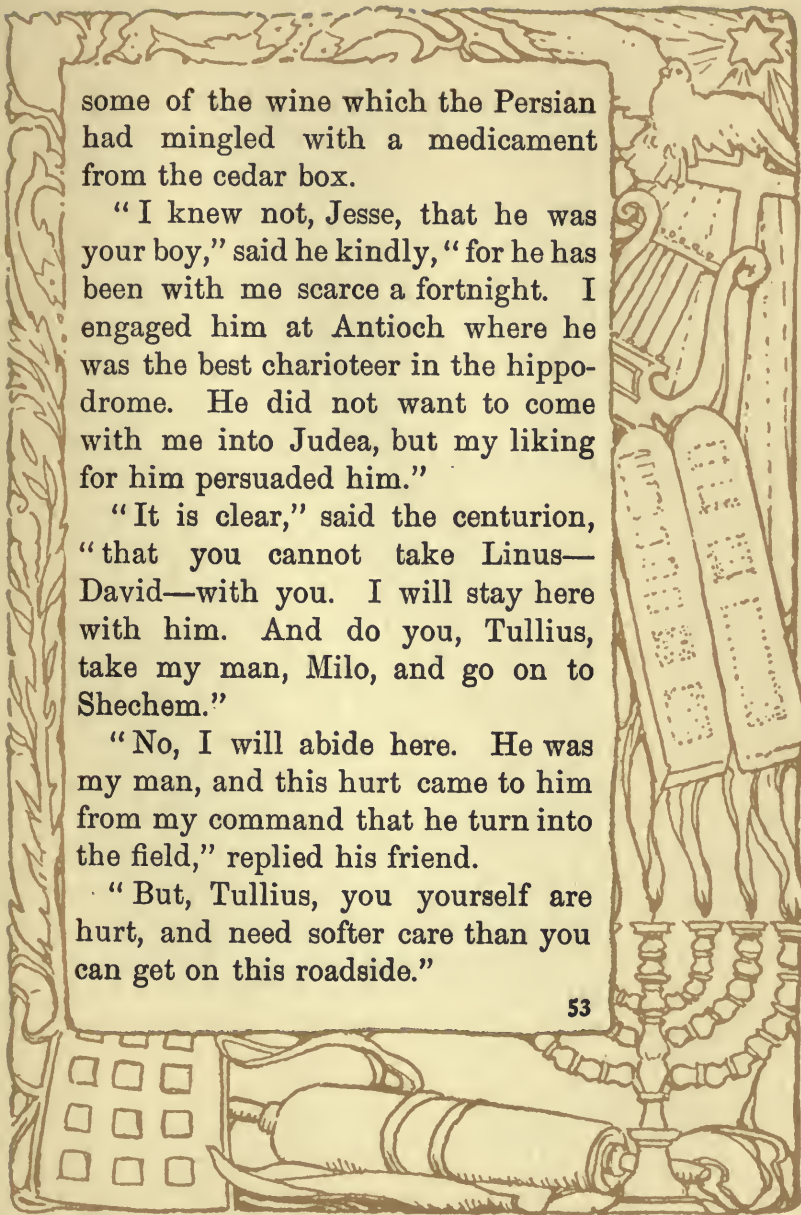
who was close at his side, could stay him, he restrained himself.

“O God, forgive me! God prevent me! No, noble Tullius, you knew not that he was my David.”

He knelt and kissed the wound, while he continued muttering, his great love making him forgetful of the by-standers, —

“My David! And this your home-coming for which I have waited and watched these years! Thank God that Rachel lived not to see this! O Rachel, better that thy heart broke with its yearning, and that God more gently took thee!”

There was a long silence. Balthazar waited until this paroxysm of grief had spent itself—for it was something too sacred to intrude upon,—then he raised the old man, and made him sit upon a folded rug. Tullius washed the blood from the wound, and forced into David’s lips



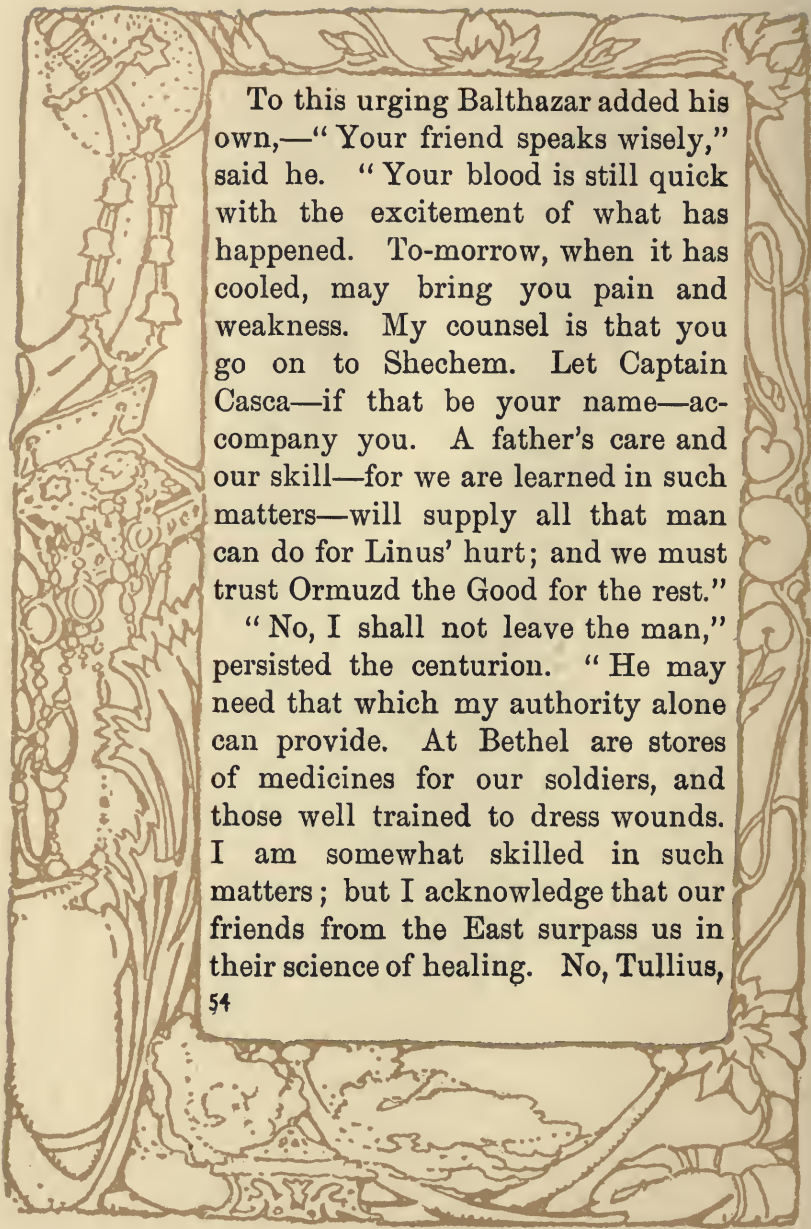
some of the wine which the Persian had mingled with a medicament from the cedar box.

"I knew not, Jesse, that he was your boy," said he kindly, "for he has been with me scarce a fortnight. I engaged him at Antioch where he was the best charioteer in the hippodrome. He did not want to come with me into Judea, but my liking for him persuaded him."

"It is clear," said the centurion, "that you cannot take Linus—David—with you. I will stay here with him. And do you, Tullius, take my man, Milo, and go on to Shechem."

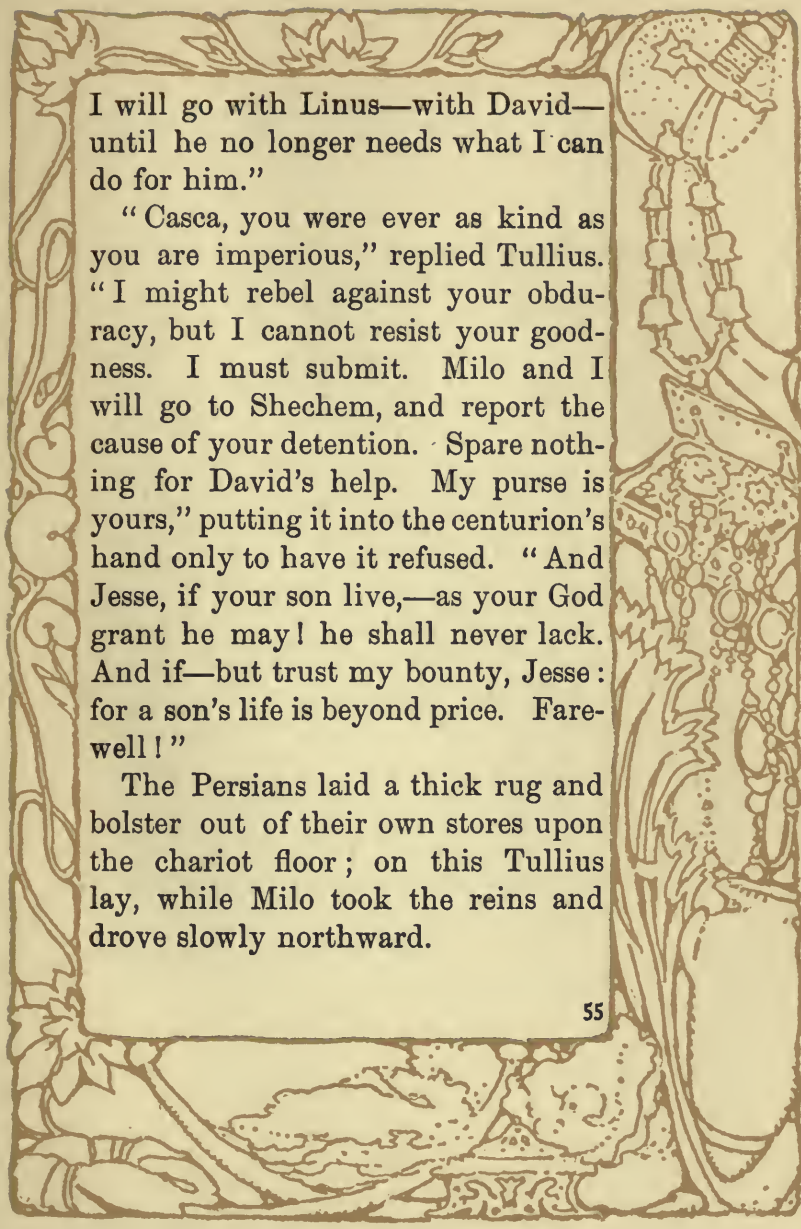
"No, I will abide here. He was my man, and this hurt came to him from my command that he turn into the field," replied his friend.

"But, Tullius, you yourself are hurt, and need softer care than you can get on this roadside."



To this urging Balthazar added his own,—“Your friend speaks wisely,” said he. “Your blood is still quick with the excitement of what has happened. To-morrow, when it has cooled, may bring you pain and weakness. My counsel is that you go on to Shechem. Let Captain Casca—if that be your name—accompany you. A father’s care and our skill—for we are learned in such matters—will supply all that man can do for Linus’ hurt; and we must trust Ormuzd the Good for the rest.”

“No, I shall not leave the man,” persisted the centurion. “He may need that which my authority alone can provide. At Bethel are stores of medicines for our soldiers, and those well trained to dress wounds. I am somewhat skilled in such matters; but I acknowledge that our friends from the East surpass us in their science of healing. No, Tullius,

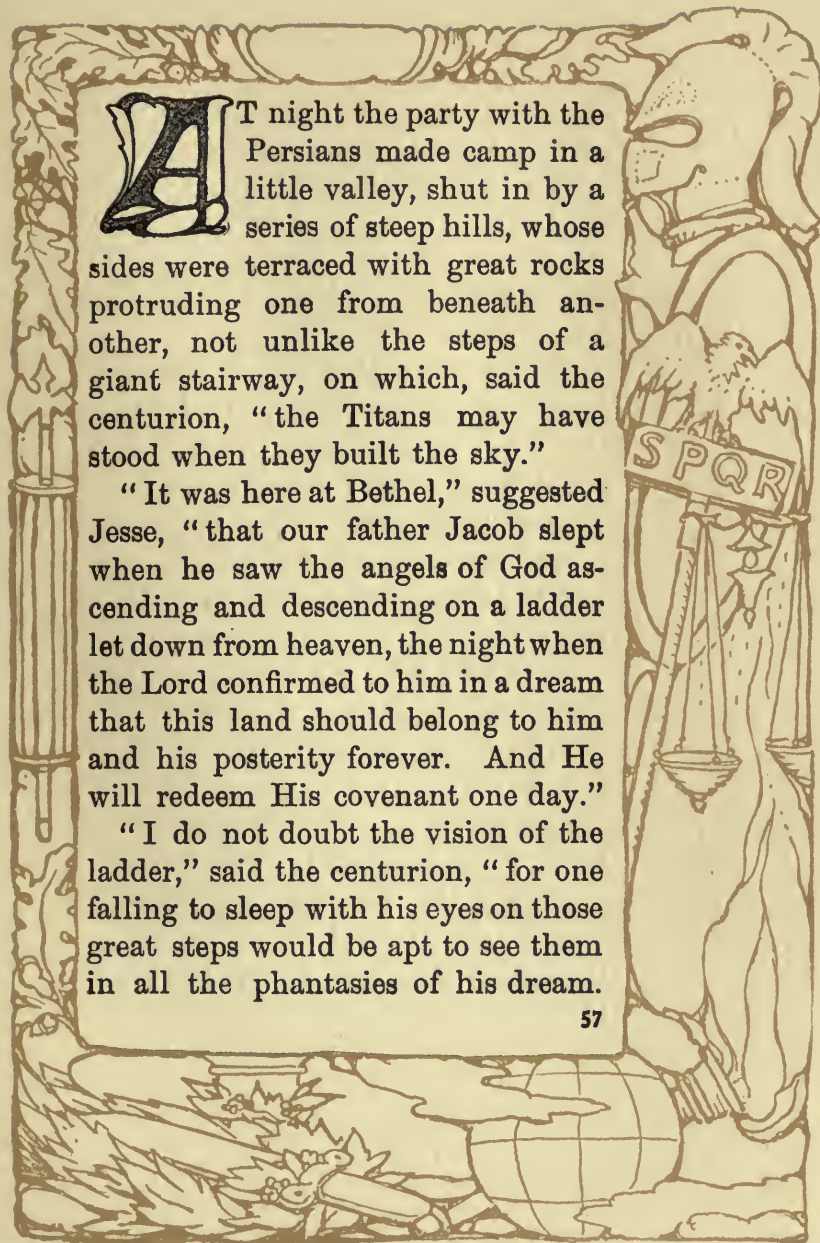


I will go with Linus—with David—until he no longer needs what I can do for him."

"Casca, you were ever as kind as you are imperious," replied Tullius. "I might rebel against your obduracy, but I cannot resist your goodness. I must submit. Milo and I will go to Shechem, and report the cause of your detention. Spare nothing for David's help. My purse is yours," putting it into the centurion's hand only to have it refused. "And Jesse, if your son live,—as your God grant he may! he shall never lack. And if—but trust my bounty, Jesse: for a son's life is beyond price. Farewell!"

The Persians laid a thick rug and bolster out of their own stores upon the chariot floor; on this Tullius lay, while Milo took the reins and drove slowly northward.

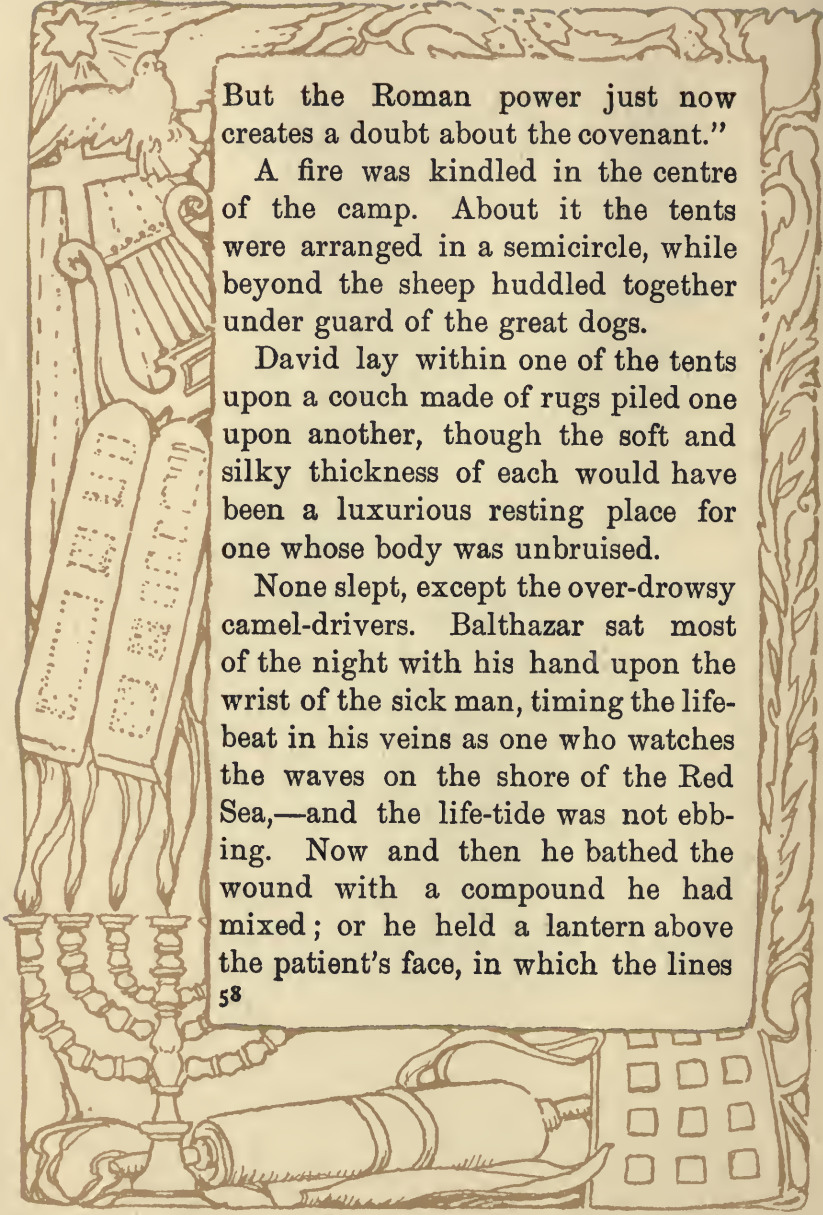




AT night the party with the Persians made camp in a little valley, shut in by a series of steep hills, whose sides were terraced with great rocks protruding one from beneath another, not unlike the steps of a giant stairway, on which, said the centurion, "the Titans may have stood when they built the sky."

"It was here at Bethel," suggested Jesse, "that our father Jacob slept when he saw the angels of God ascending and descending on a ladder let down from heaven, the night when the Lord confirmed to him in a dream that this land should belong to him and his posterity forever. And He will redeem His covenant one day."

"I do not doubt the vision of the ladder," said the centurion, "for one falling to sleep with his eyes on those great steps would be apt to see them in all the phantasies of his dream."

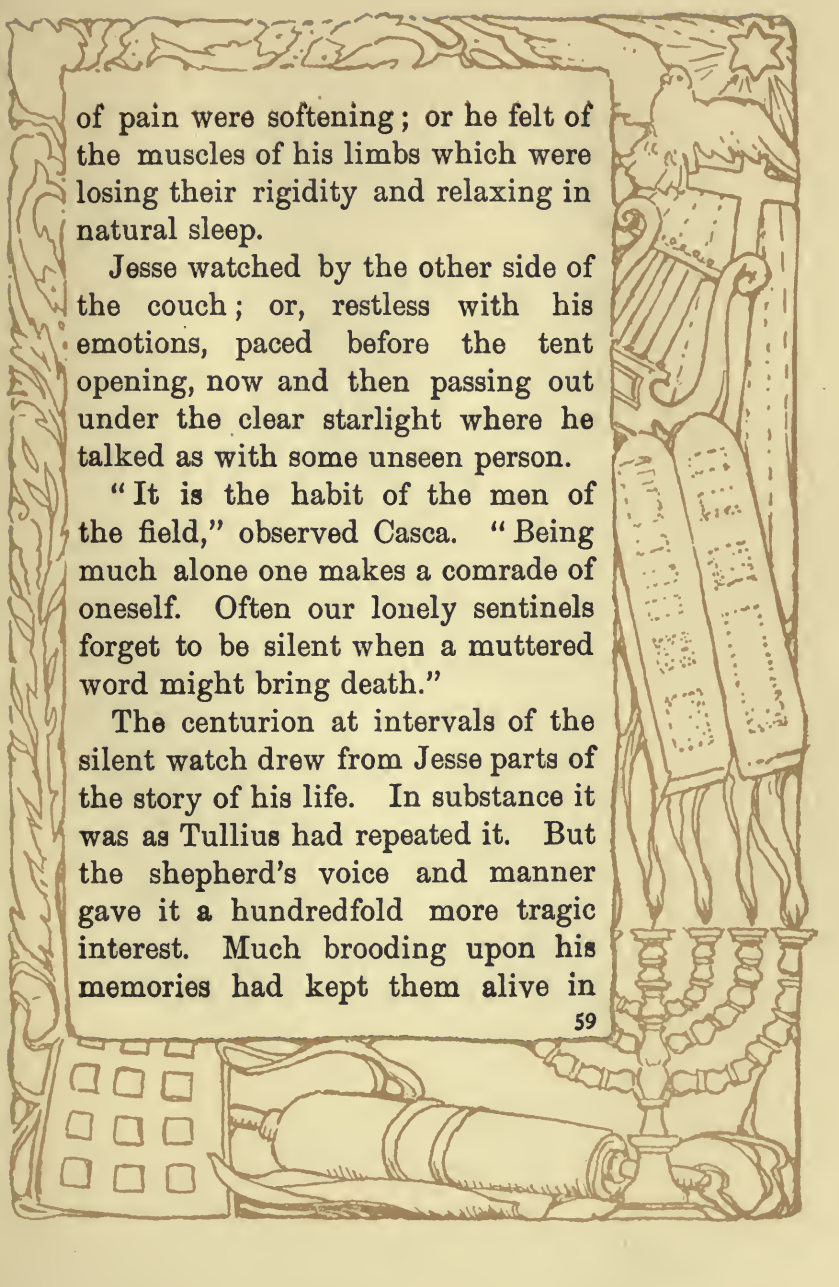


But the Roman power just now creates a doubt about the covenant."

A fire was kindled in the centre of the camp. About it the tents were arranged in a semicircle, while beyond the sheep huddled together under guard of the great dogs.

David lay within one of the tents upon a couch made of rugs piled one upon another, though the soft and silky thickness of each would have been a luxurious resting place for one whose body was unbruised.

None slept, except the over-drowsy camel-drivers. Balthazar sat most of the night with his hand upon the wrist of the sick man, timing the life-beat in his veins as one who watches the waves on the shore of the Red Sea,—and the life-tide was not ebbing. Now and then he bathed the wound with a compound he had mixed; or he held a lantern above the patient's face, in which the lines

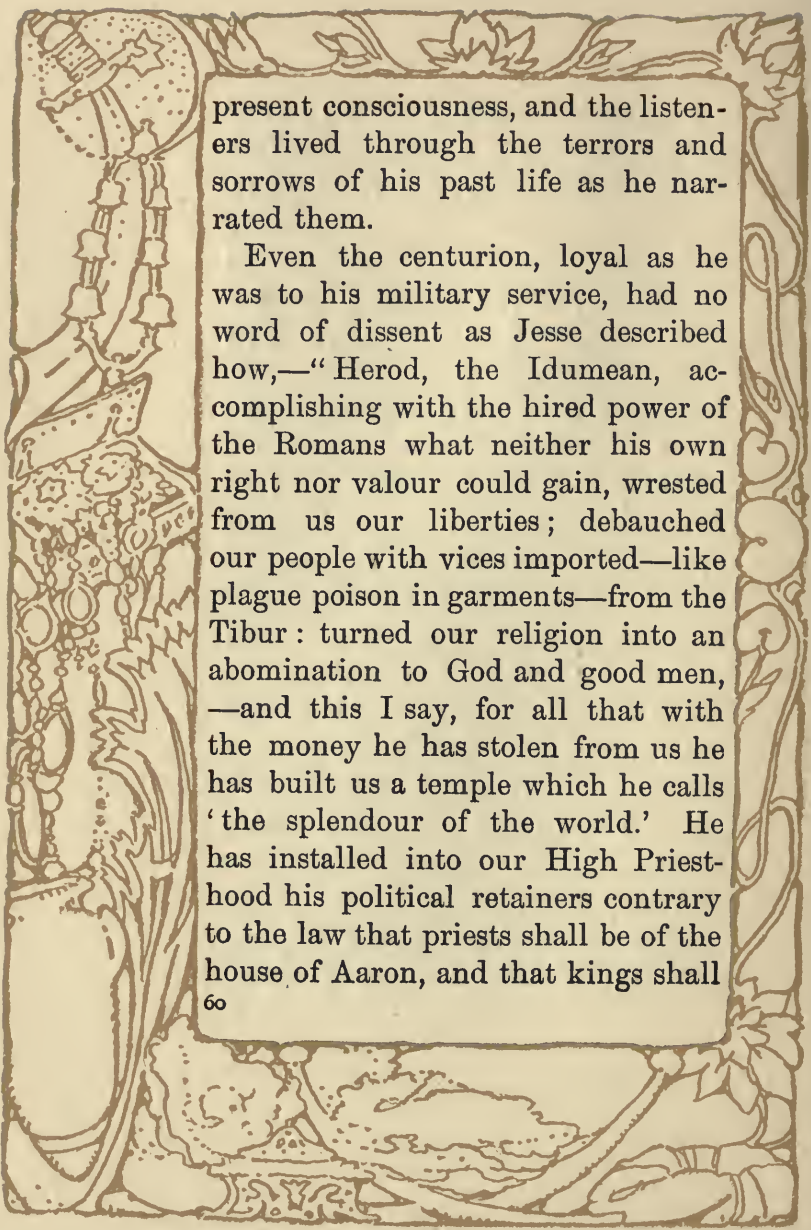


of pain were softening ; or he felt of the muscles of his limbs which were losing their rigidity and relaxing in natural sleep.

Jesse watched by the other side of the couch ; or, restless with his emotions, paced before the tent opening, now and then passing out under the clear starlight where he talked as with some unseen person.

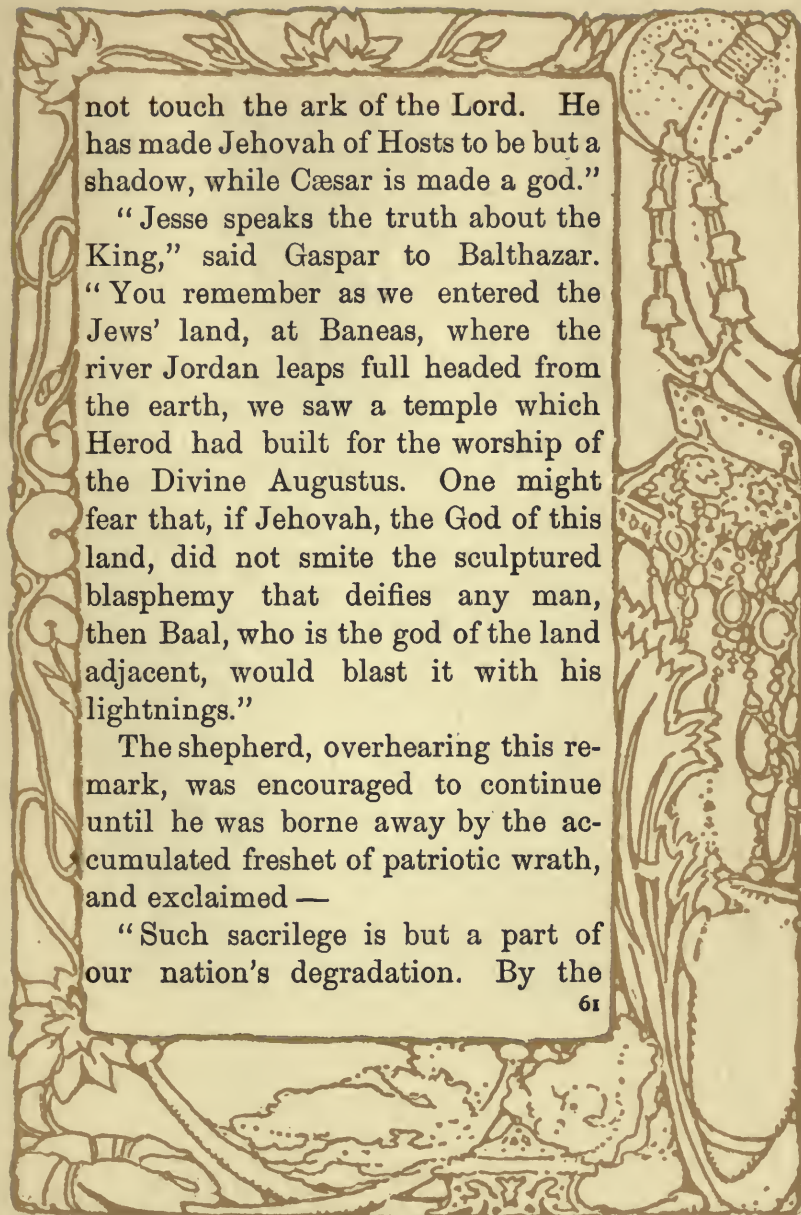
"It is the habit of the men of the field," observed Casca. "Being much alone one makes a comrade of oneself. Often our lonely sentinels forget to be silent when a muttered word might bring death."

The centurion at intervals of the silent watch drew from Jesse parts of the story of his life. In substance it was as Tullius had repeated it. But the shepherd's voice and manner gave it a hundredfold more tragic interest. Much brooding upon his memories had kept them alive in



present consciousness, and the listeners lived through the terrors and sorrows of his past life as he narrated them.

Even the centurion, loyal as he was to his military service, had no word of dissent as Jesse described how,—“Herod, the Idumean, accomplishing with the hired power of the Romans what neither his own right nor valour could gain, wrested from us our liberties; debauched our people with vices imported—like plague poison in garments—from the Tibur: turned our religion into an abomination to God and good men,—and this I say, for all that with the money he has stolen from us he has built us a temple which he calls ‘the splendour of the world.’ He has installed into our High Priesthood his political retainers contrary to the law that priests shall be of the house of Aaron, and that kings shall

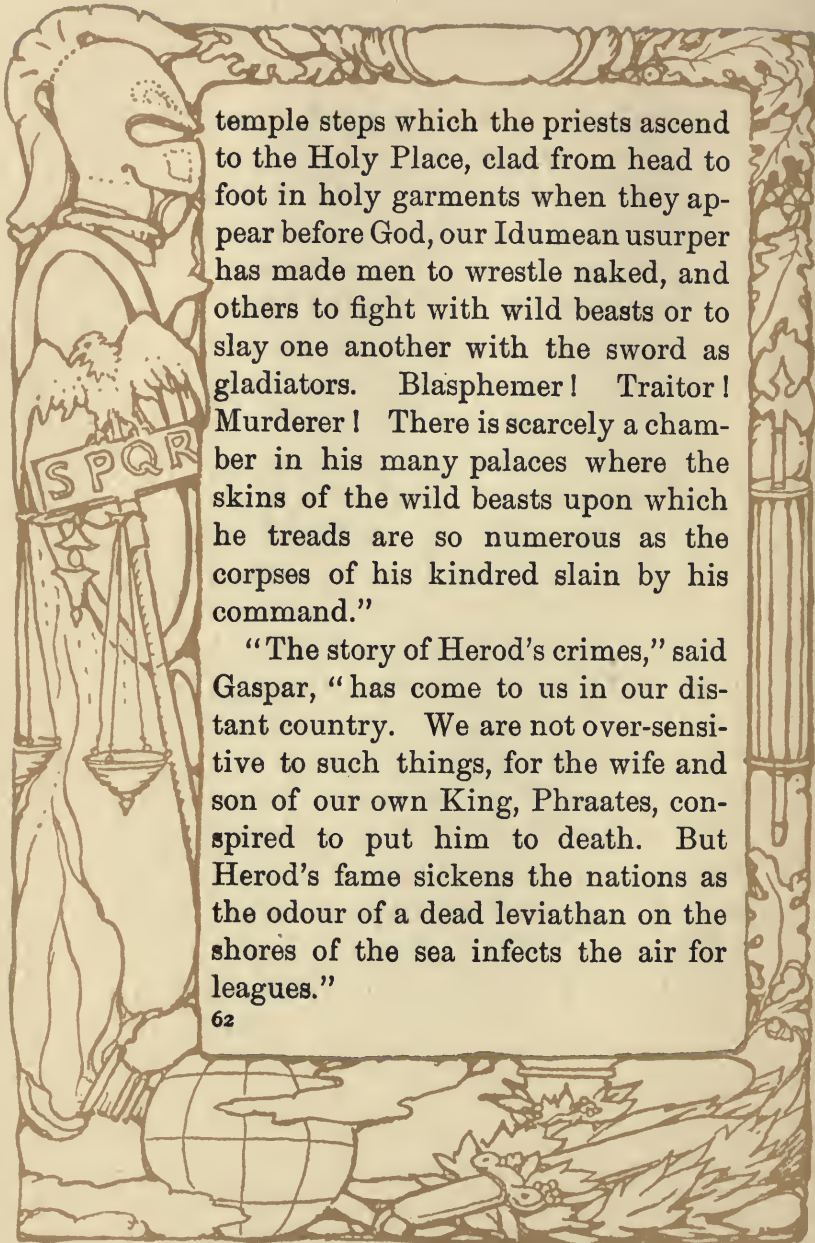


not touch the ark of the Lord. He has made Jehovah of Hosts to be but a shadow, while Cæsar is made a god."

"Jesse speaks the truth about the King," said Gaspar to Balthazar. "You remember as we entered the Jews' land, at Baneas, where the river Jordan leaps full headed from the earth, we saw a temple which Herod had built for the worship of the Divine Augustus. One might fear that, if Jehovah, the God of this land, did not smite the sculptured blasphemy that deifies any man, then Baal, who is the god of the land adjacent, would blast it with his lightnings."

The shepherd, overhearing this remark, was encouraged to continue until he was borne away by the accumulated freshet of patriotic wrath, and exclaimed —

"Such sacrilege is but a part of our nation's degradation. By the

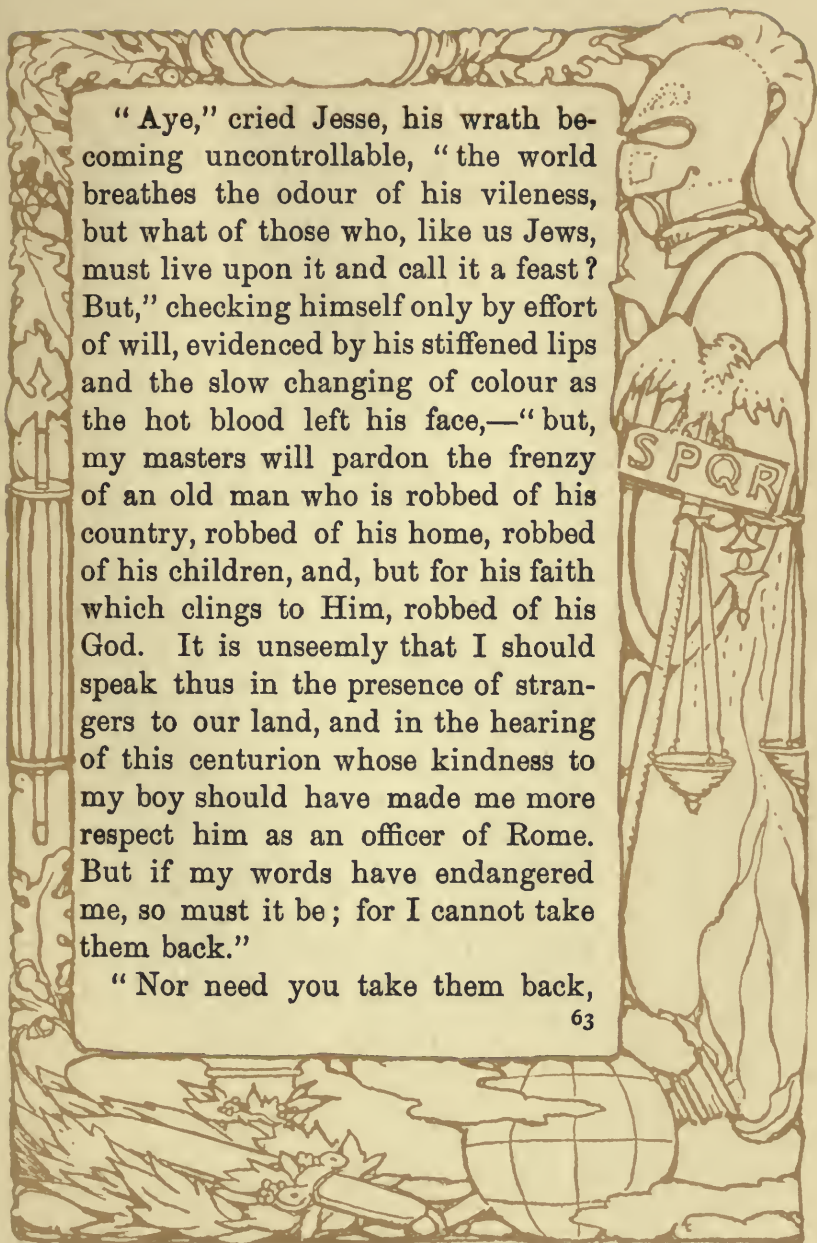


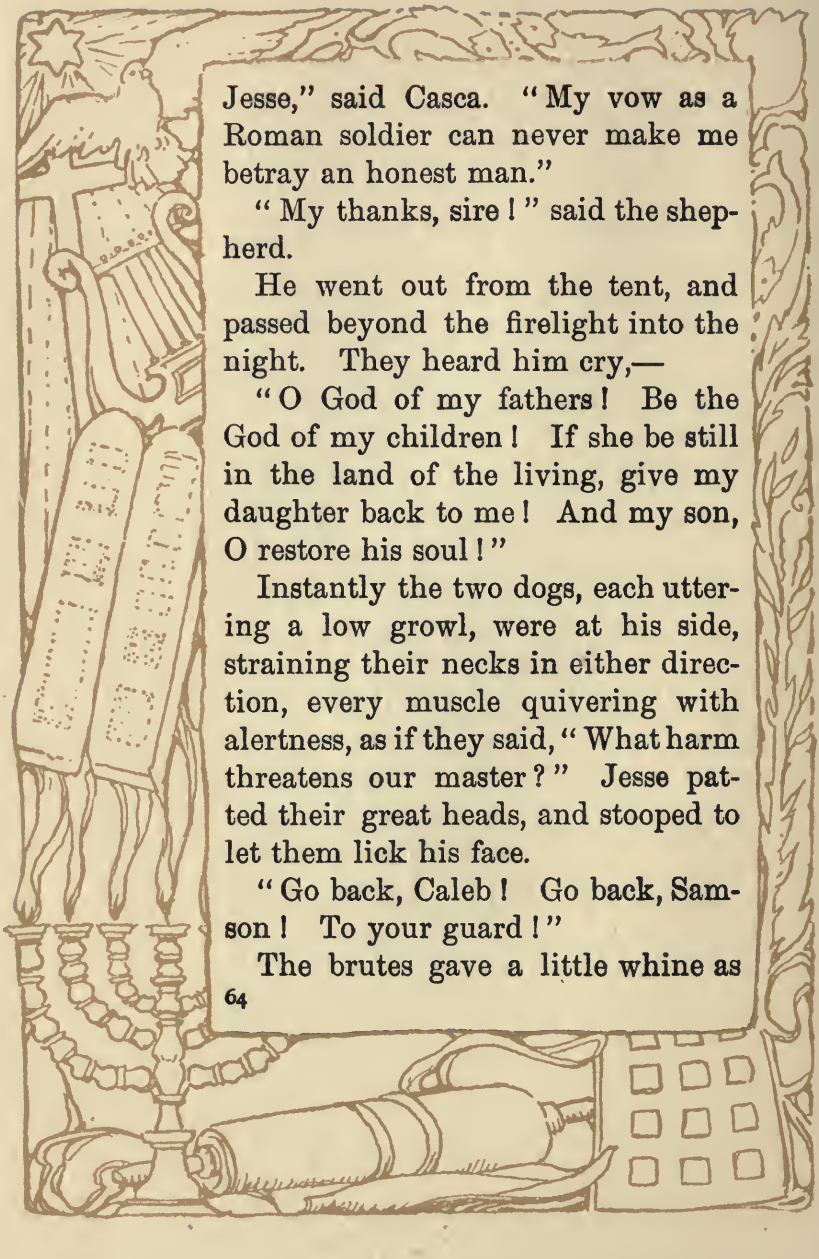
temple steps which the priests ascend to the Holy Place, clad from head to foot in holy garments when they appear before God, our Idumean usurper has made men to wrestle naked, and others to fight with wild beasts or to slay one another with the sword as gladiators. Blasphemer! Traitor! Murderer! There is scarcely a chamber in his many palaces where the skins of the wild beasts upon which he treads are so numerous as the corpses of his kindred slain by his command."

"The story of Herod's crimes," said Gaspar, "has come to us in our distant country. We are not over-sensitive to such things, for the wife and son of our own King, Phraates, conspired to put him to death. But Herod's fame sickens the nations as the odour of a dead leviathan on the shores of the sea infects the air for leagues."

"Aye," cried Jesse, his wrath becoming uncontrollable, "the world breathes the odour of his vileness, but what of those who, like us Jews, must live upon it and call it a feast? But," checking himself only by effort of will, evidenced by his stiffened lips and the slow changing of colour as the hot blood left his face,—“but, my masters will pardon the frenzy of an old man who is robbed of his country, robbed of his home, robbed of his children, and, but for his faith which clings to Him, robbed of his God. It is unseemly that I should speak thus in the presence of strangers to our land, and in the hearing of this centurion whose kindness to my boy should have made me more respect him as an officer of Rome. But if my words have endangered me, so must it be; for I cannot take them back.”

“Nor need you take them back,





Jesse," said Casca. "My vow as a Roman soldier can never make me betray an honest man."

"My thanks, sire!" said the shepherd.

He went out from the tent, and passed beyond the firelight into the night. They heard him cry,—

"O God of my fathers! Be the God of my children! If she be still in the land of the living, give my daughter back to me! And my son, O restore his soul!"

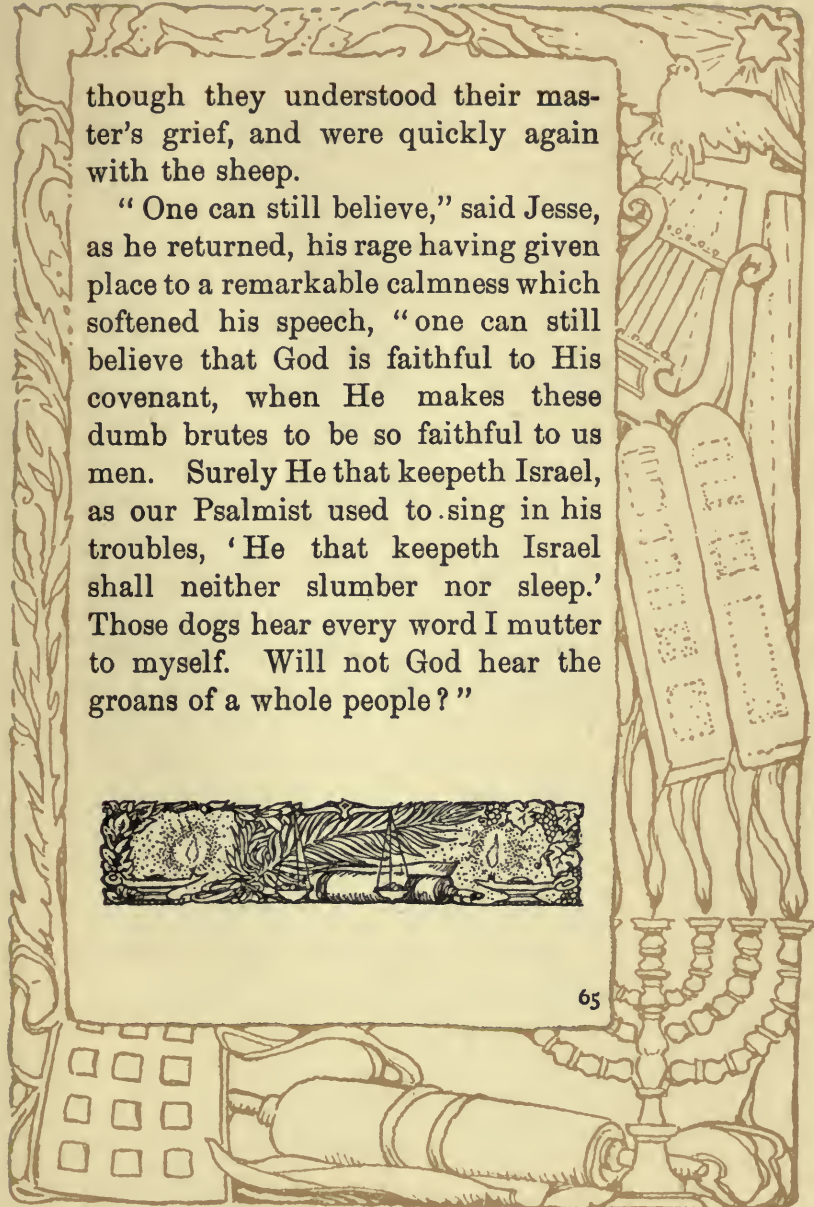
Instantly the two dogs, each uttering a low growl, were at his side, straining their necks in either direction, every muscle quivering with alertness, as if they said, "What harm threatens our master?" Jesse patted their great heads, and stooped to let them lick his face.

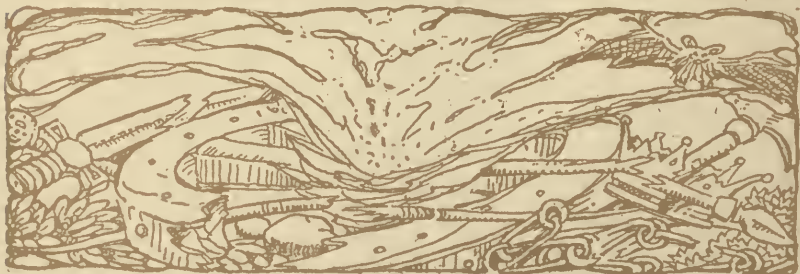
"Go back, Caleb! Go back, Samson! To your guard!"

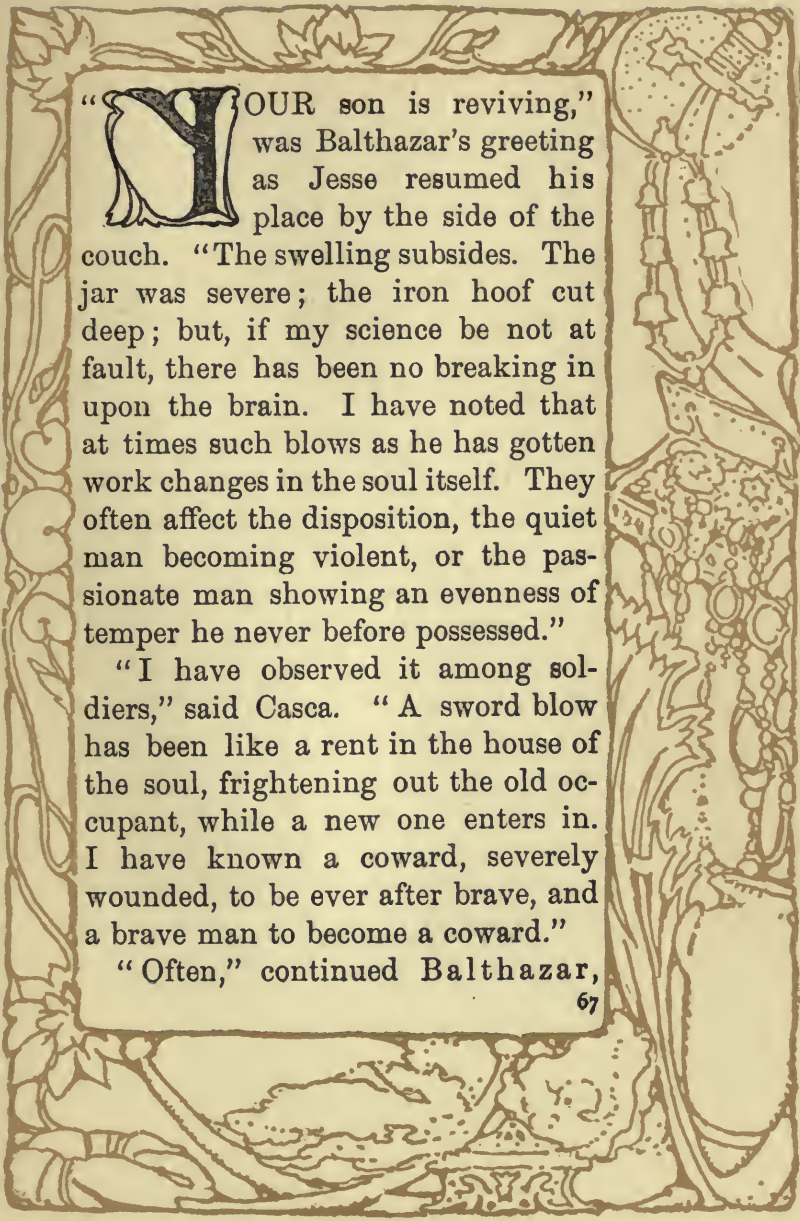
The brutes gave a little whine as

though they understood their master's grief, and were quickly again with the sheep.

"One can still believe," said Jesse, as he returned, his rage having given place to a remarkable calmness which softened his speech, "one can still believe that God is faithful to His covenant, when He makes these dumb brutes to be so faithful to us men. Surely He that keepeth Israel, as our Psalmist used to sing in his troubles, 'He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.' Those dogs hear every word I mutter to myself. Will not God hear the groans of a whole people?"



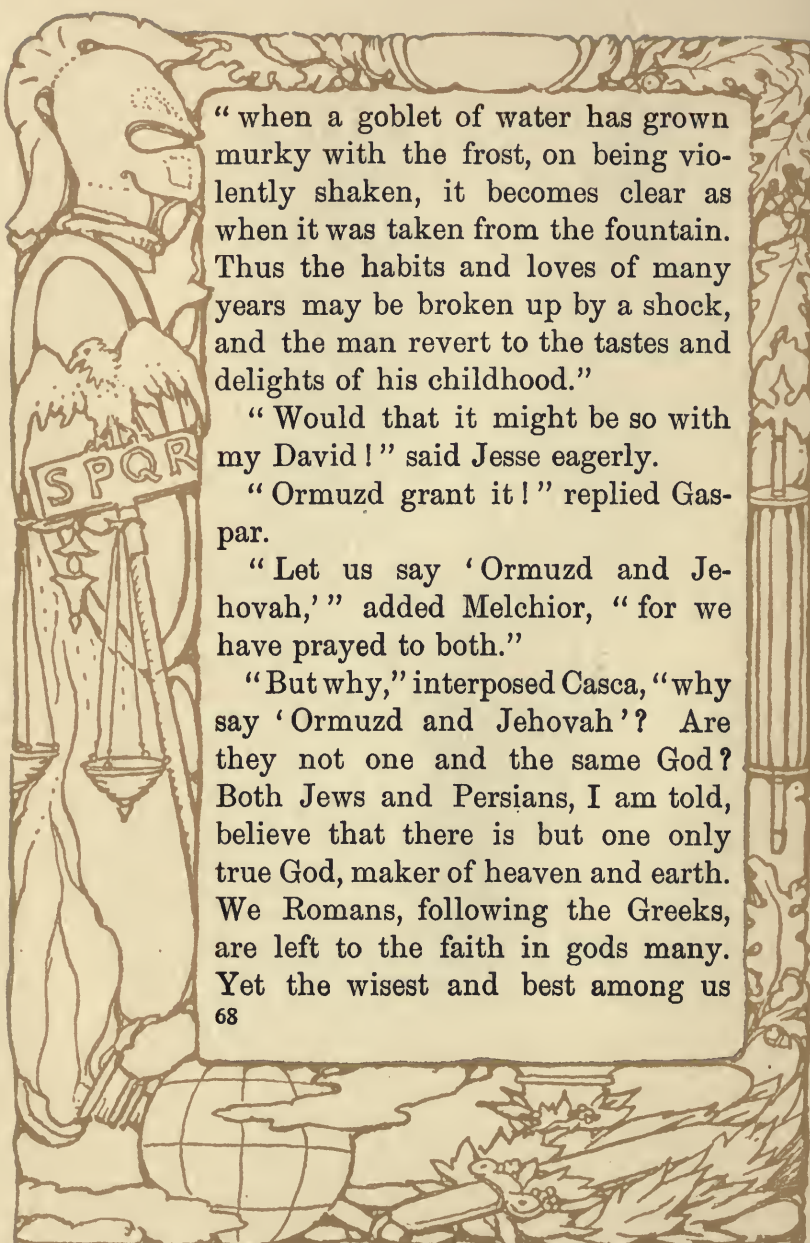




YOUR son is reviving," was Balthazar's greeting as Jesse resumed his place by the side of the couch. "The swelling subsides. The jar was severe; the iron hoof cut deep; but, if my science be not at fault, there has been no breaking in upon the brain. I have noted that at times such blows as he has gotten work changes in the soul itself. They often affect the disposition, the quiet man becoming violent, or the passionate man showing an evenness of temper he never before possessed."

"I have observed it among soldiers," said Casca. "A sword blow has been like a rent in the house of the soul, frightening out the old occupant, while a new one enters in. I have known a coward, severely wounded, to be ever after brave, and a brave man to become a coward."

"Often," continued Balthazar,



“when a goblet of water has grown murky with the frost, on being violently shaken, it becomes clear as when it was taken from the fountain. Thus the habits and loves of many years may be broken up by a shock, and the man revert to the tastes and delights of his childhood.”

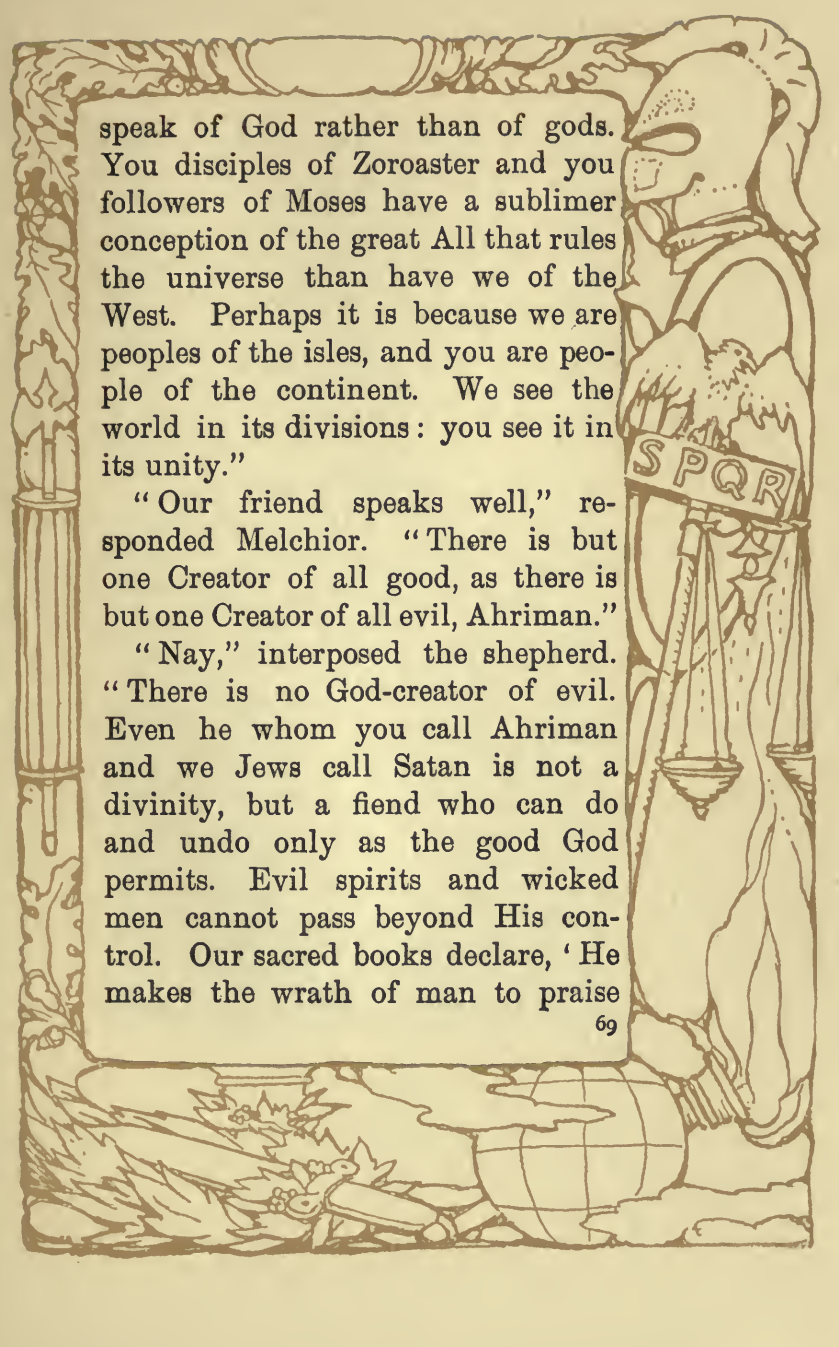
“Would that it might be so with my David!” said Jesse eagerly.

“Ormuzd grant it!” replied Gaspar.

“Let us say ‘Ormuzd and Jehovah,’” added Melchior, “for we have prayed to both.”

“But why,” interposed Casca, “why say ‘Ormuzd and Jehovah’? Are they not one and the same God? Both Jews and Persians, I am told, believe that there is but one only true God, maker of heaven and earth. We Romans, following the Greeks, are left to the faith in gods many. Yet the wisest and best among us

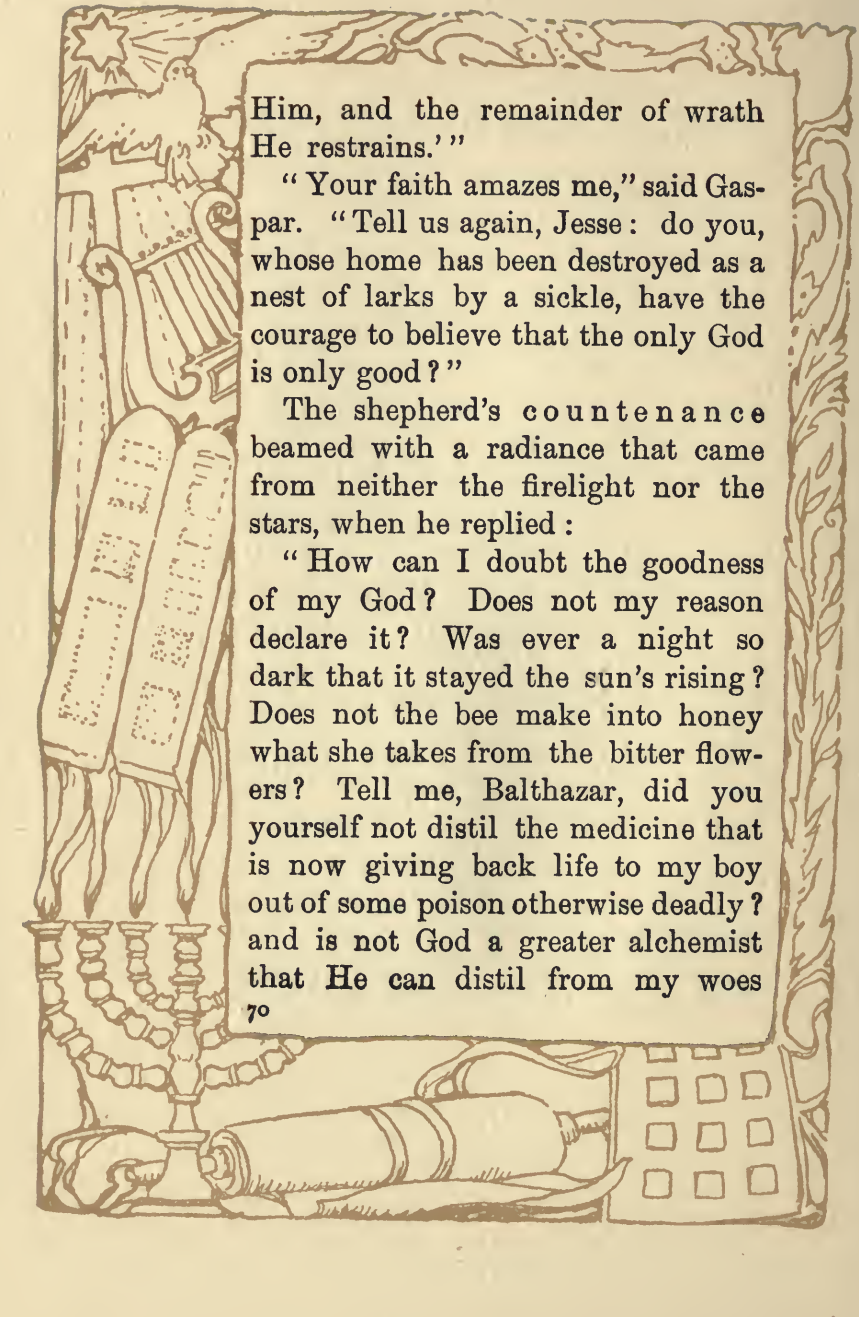
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speak of God rather than of gods. You disciples of Zoroaster and you followers of Moses have a sublimer conception of the great All that rules the universe than have we of the West. Perhaps it is because we are peoples of the isles, and you are people of the continent. We see the world in its divisions: you see it in its unity."

"Our friend speaks well," responded Melchior. "There is but one Creator of all good, as there is but one Creator of all evil, Ahriman."

"Nay," interposed the shepherd. "There is no God-creator of evil. Even he whom you call Ahriman and we Jews call Satan is not a divinity, but a fiend who can do and undo only as the good God permits. Evil spirits and wicked men cannot pass beyond His control. Our sacred books declare, 'He makes the wrath of man to praise

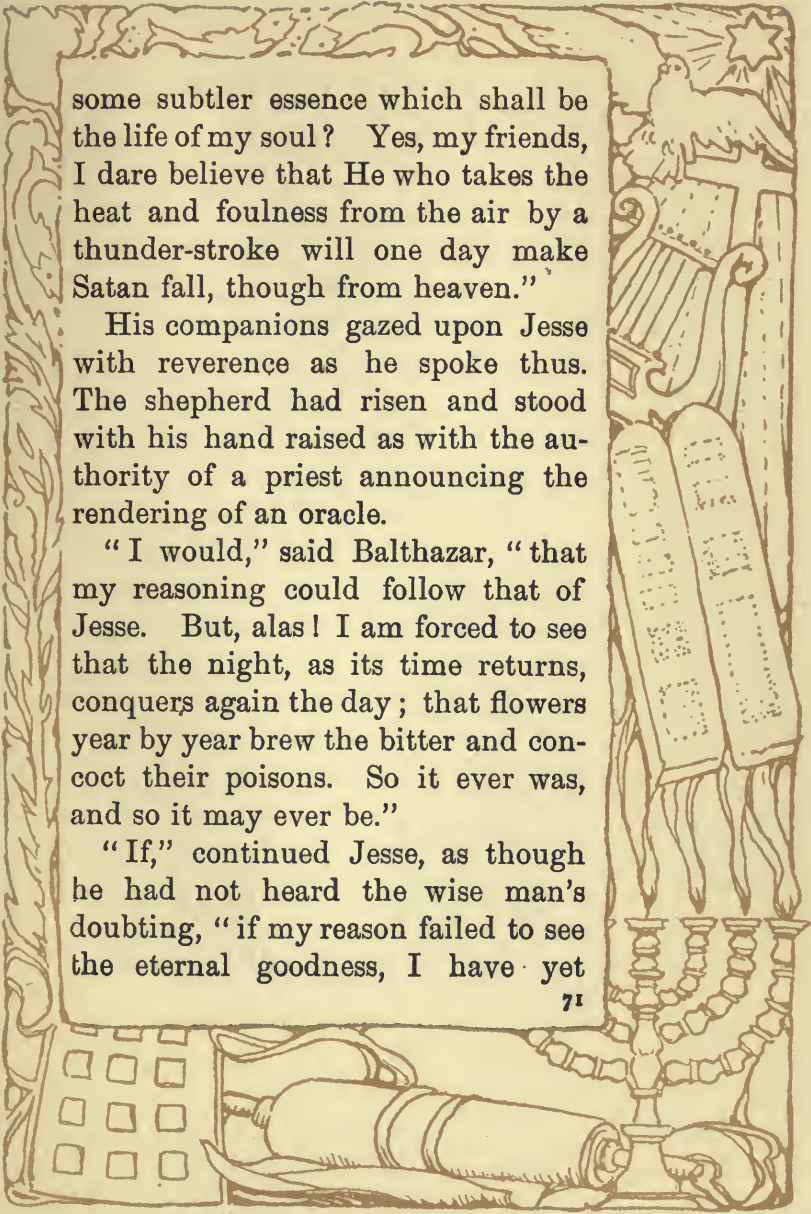


Him, and the remainder of wrath
He restrains.' ”

“ Your faith amazes me,” said Gaspar. “ Tell us again, Jesse : do you, whose home has been destroyed as a nest of larks by a sickle, have the courage to believe that the only God is only good ? ”

The shepherd's countenance beamed with a radiance that came from neither the firelight nor the stars, when he replied :

“ How can I doubt the goodness of my God ? Does not my reason declare it ? Was ever a night so dark that it stayed the sun's rising ? Does not the bee make into honey what she takes from the bitter flowers ? Tell me, Balthazar, did you yourself not distil the medicine that is now giving back life to my boy out of some poison otherwise deadly ? and is not God a greater alchemist that He can distil from my woes

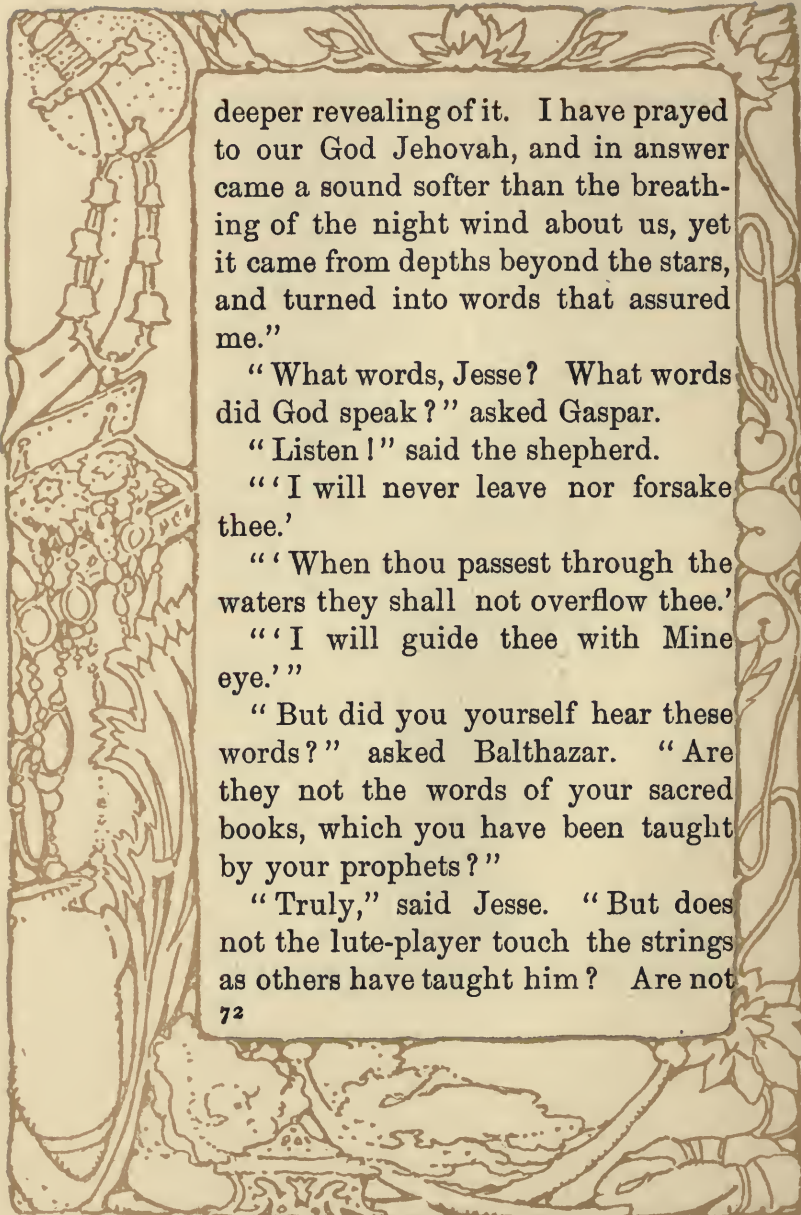


some subtler essence which shall be the life of my soul? Yes, my friends, I dare believe that He who takes the heat and foulness from the air by a thunder-stroke will one day make Satan fall, though from heaven."

His companions gazed upon Jesse with reverence as he spoke thus. The shepherd had risen and stood with his hand raised as with the authority of a priest announcing the rendering of an oracle.

"I would," said Balthazar, "that my reasoning could follow that of Jesse. But, alas! I am forced to see that the night, as its time returns, conquers again the day; that flowers year by year brew the bitter and concoct their poisons. So it ever was, and so it may ever be."

"If," continued Jesse, as though he had not heard the wise man's doubting, "if my reason failed to see the eternal goodness, I have yet



deeper revealing of it. I have prayed to our God Jehovah, and in answer came a sound softer than the breathing of the night wind about us, yet it came from depths beyond the stars, and turned into words that assured me."

"What words, Jesse? What words did God speak?" asked Gaspar.

"Listen!" said the shepherd.

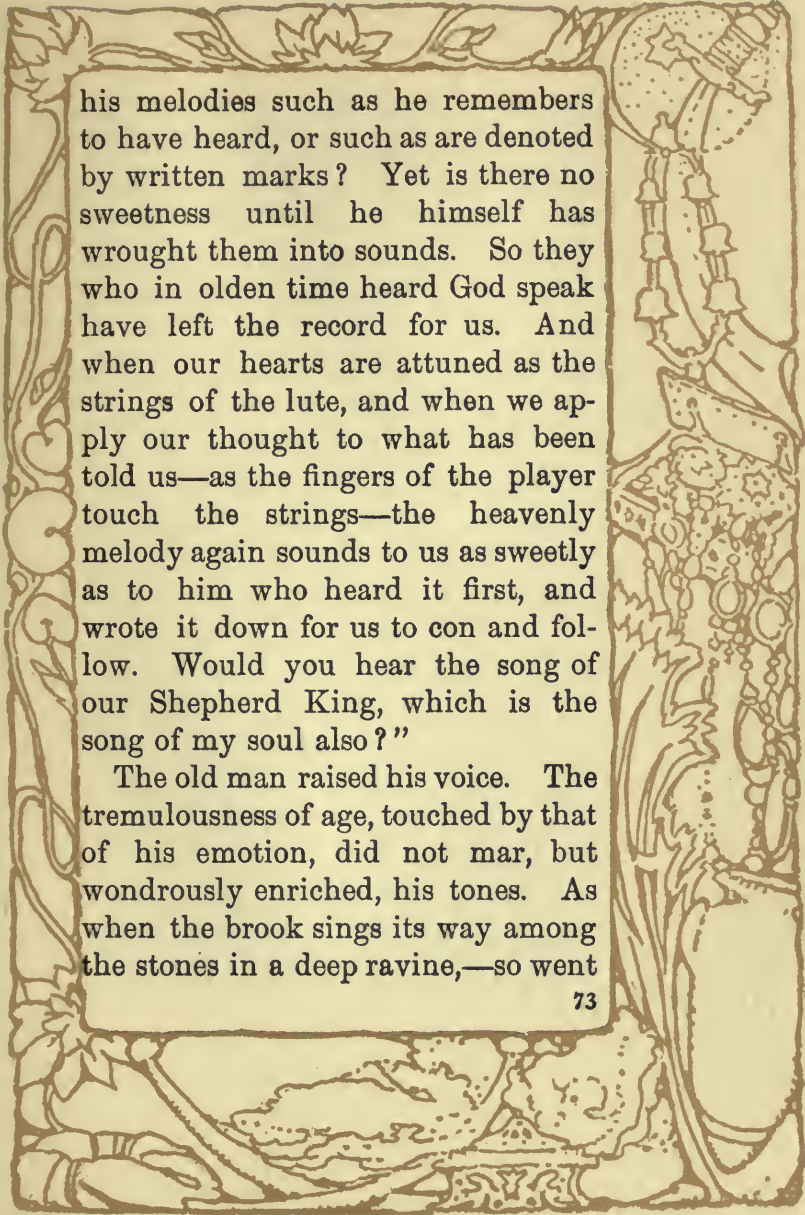
"I will never leave nor forsake thee."

"When thou passest through the waters they shall not overflow thee."

"I will guide thee with Mine eye."

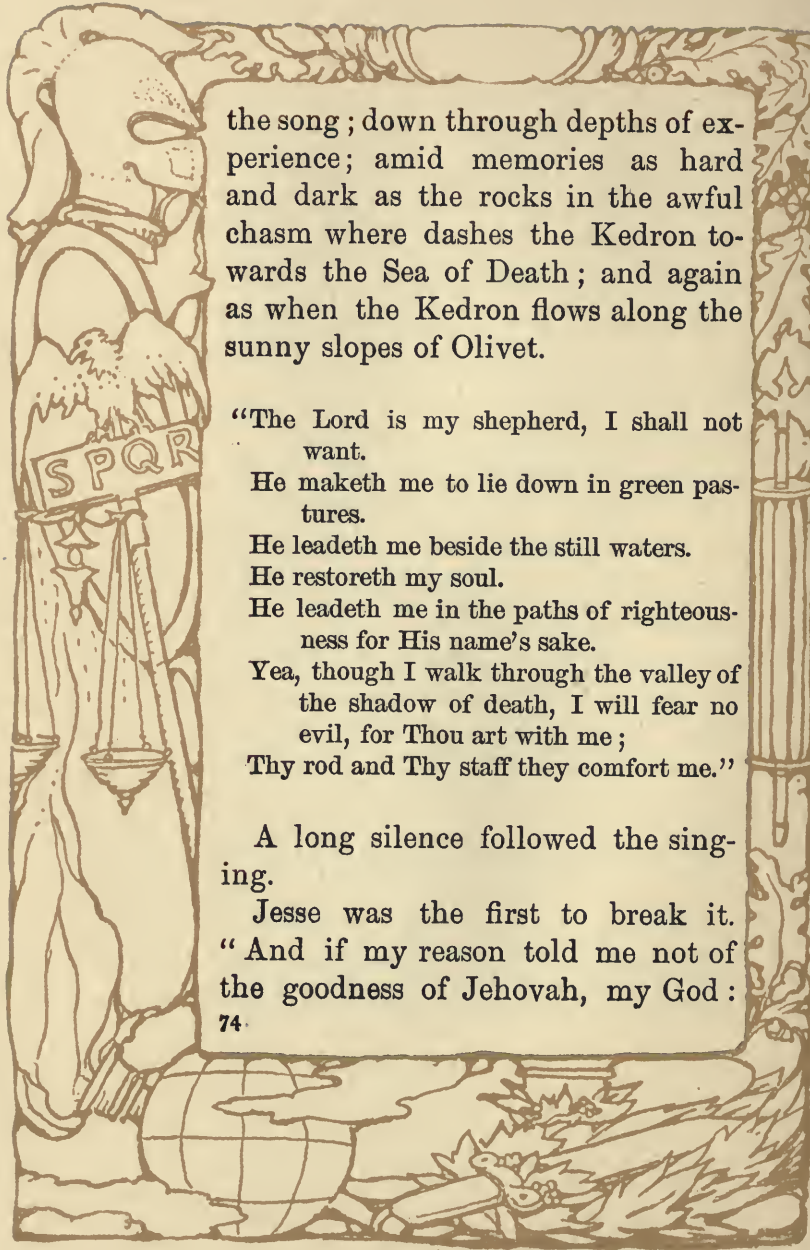
"But did you yourself hear these words?" asked Balthazar. "Are they not the words of your sacred books, which you have been taught by your prophets?"

"Truly," said Jesse. "But does not the lute-player touch the strings as others have taught him? Are not



his melodies such as he remembers to have heard, or such as are denoted by written marks? Yet is there no sweetness until he himself has wrought them into sounds. So they who in olden time heard God speak have left the record for us. And when our hearts are attuned as the strings of the lute, and when we apply our thought to what has been told us—as the fingers of the player touch the strings—the heavenly melody again sounds to us as sweetly as to him who heard it first, and wrote it down for us to con and follow. Would you hear the song of our Shepherd King, which is the song of my soul also?"

The old man raised his voice. The tremulousness of age, touched by that of his emotion, did not mar, but wondrously enriched, his tones. As when the brook sings its way among the stones in a deep ravine,—so went



the song ; down through depths of experience ; amid memories as hard and dark as the rocks in the awful chasm where dashes the Kedron towards the Sea of Death ; and again as when the Kedron flows along the sunny slopes of Olivet.

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.

He leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul.

He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me ;

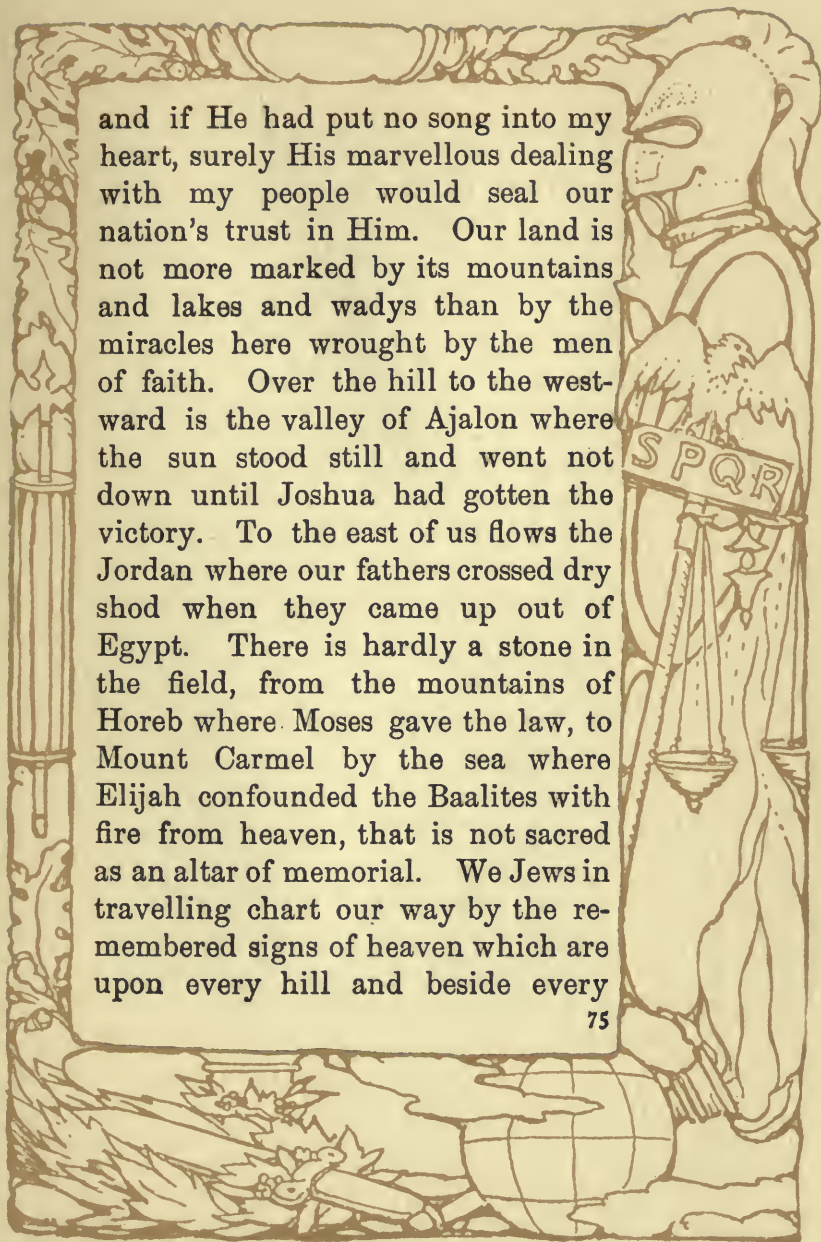
Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.”

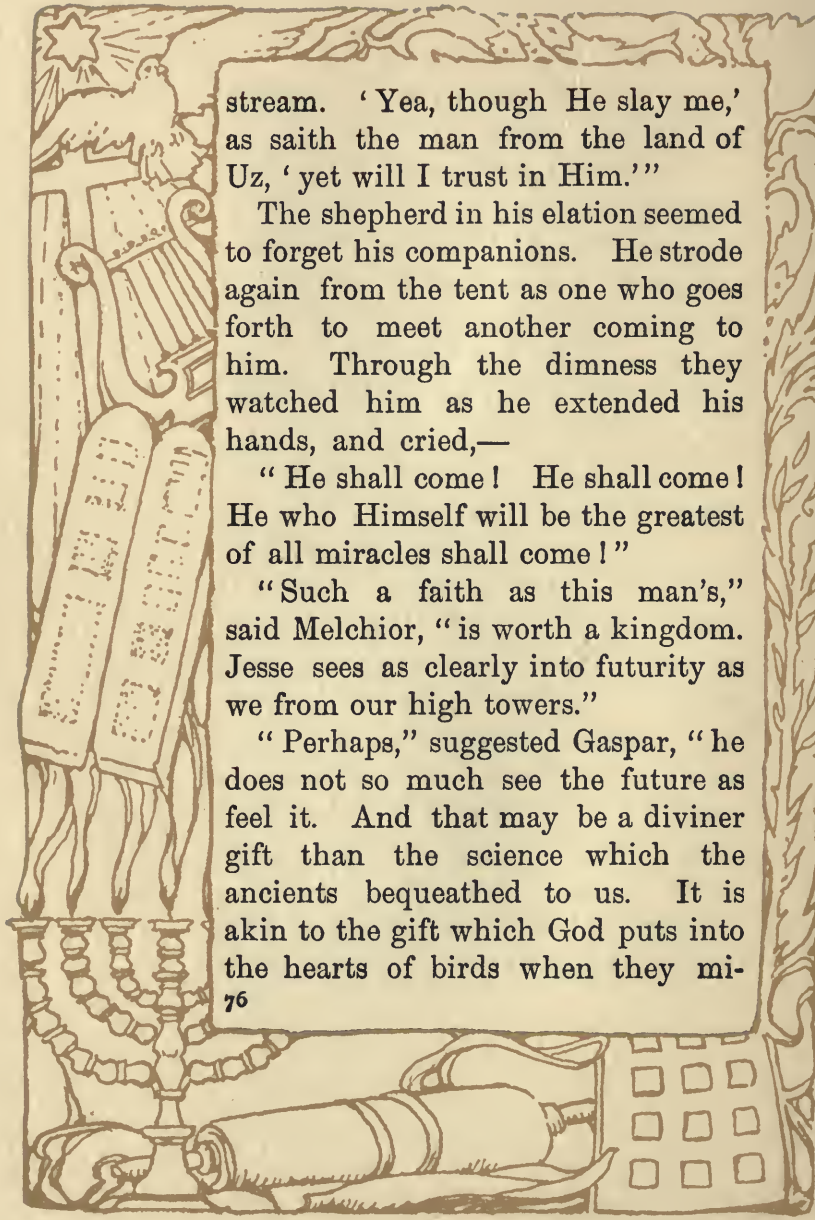
A long silence followed the singing.

Jesse was the first to break it.

“And if my reason told me not of the goodness of Jehovah, my God :

and if He had put no song into my heart, surely His marvellous dealing with my people would seal our nation's trust in Him. Our land is not more marked by its mountains and lakes and wadys than by the miracles here wrought by the men of faith. Over the hill to the westward is the valley of Ajalon where the sun stood still and went not down until Joshua had gotten the victory. To the east of us flows the Jordan where our fathers crossed dry shod when they came up out of Egypt. There is hardly a stone in the field, from the mountains of Horeb where Moses gave the law, to Mount Carmel by the sea where Elijah confounded the Baalites with fire from heaven, that is not sacred as an altar of memorial. We Jews in travelling chart our way by the remembered signs of heaven which are upon every hill and beside every





stream. 'Yea, though He slay me,'
as saith the man from the land of
Uz, 'yet will I trust in Him.'"

The shepherd in his elation seemed
to forget his companions. He strode
again from the tent as one who goes
forth to meet another coming to
him. Through the dimness they
watched him as he extended his
hands, and cried,—

"He shall come! He shall come!
He who Himself will be the greatest
of all miracles shall come!"

"Such a faith as this man's,"
said Melchior, "is worth a kingdom.
Jesse sees as clearly into futurity as
we from our high towers."

"Perhaps," suggested Gaspar, "he
does not so much see the future as
feel it. And that may be a diviner
gift than the science which the
ancients bequeathed to us. It is
akin to the gift which God puts into
the hearts of birds when they mi-

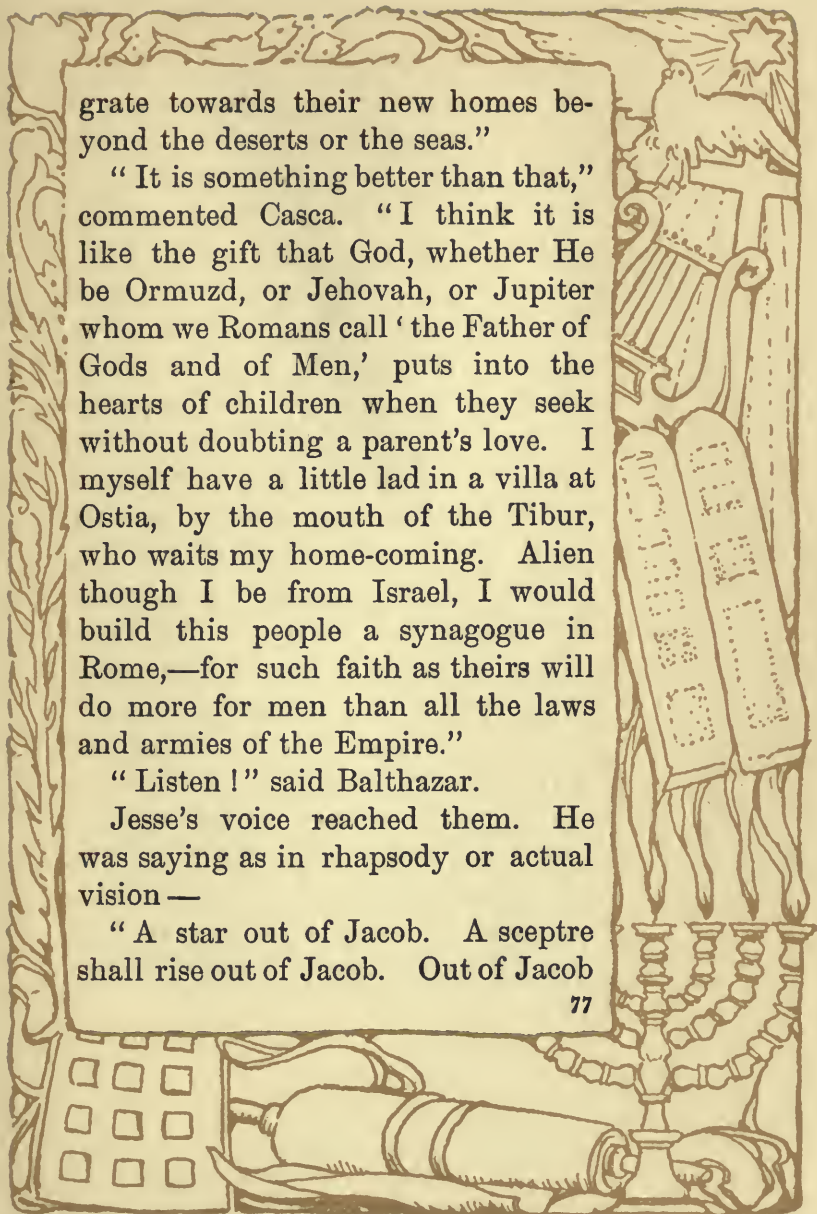
grate towards their new homes beyond the deserts or the seas."

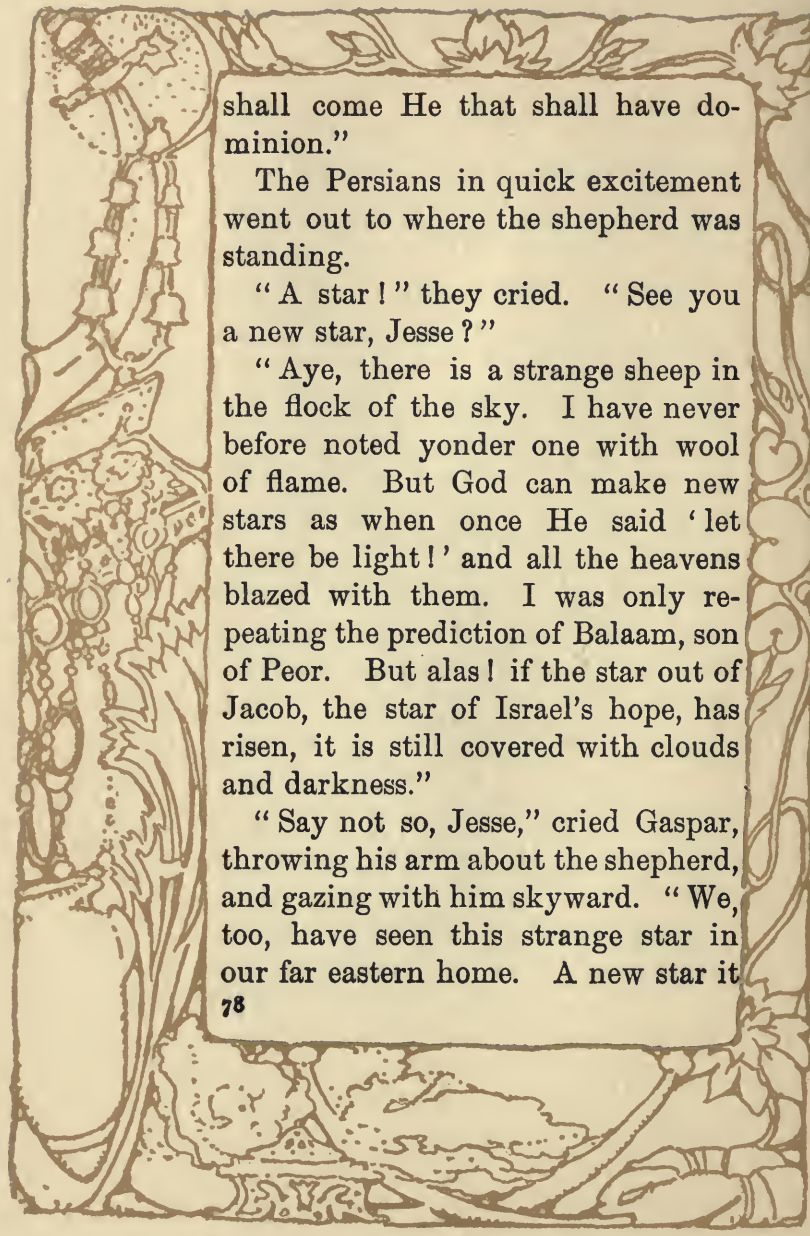
"It is something better than that," commented Casca. "I think it is like the gift that God, whether He be Ormuzd, or Jehovah, or Jupiter whom we Romans call 'the Father of Gods and of Men,' puts into the hearts of children when they seek without doubting a parent's love. I myself have a little lad in a villa at Ostia, by the mouth of the Tibur, who waits my home-coming. Alien though I be from Israel, I would build this people a synagogue in Rome,—for such faith as theirs will do more for men than all the laws and armies of the Empire."

"Listen!" said Balthazar.

Jesse's voice reached them. He was saying as in rhapsody or actual vision —

"A star out of Jacob. A sceptre shall rise out of Jacob. Out of Jacob





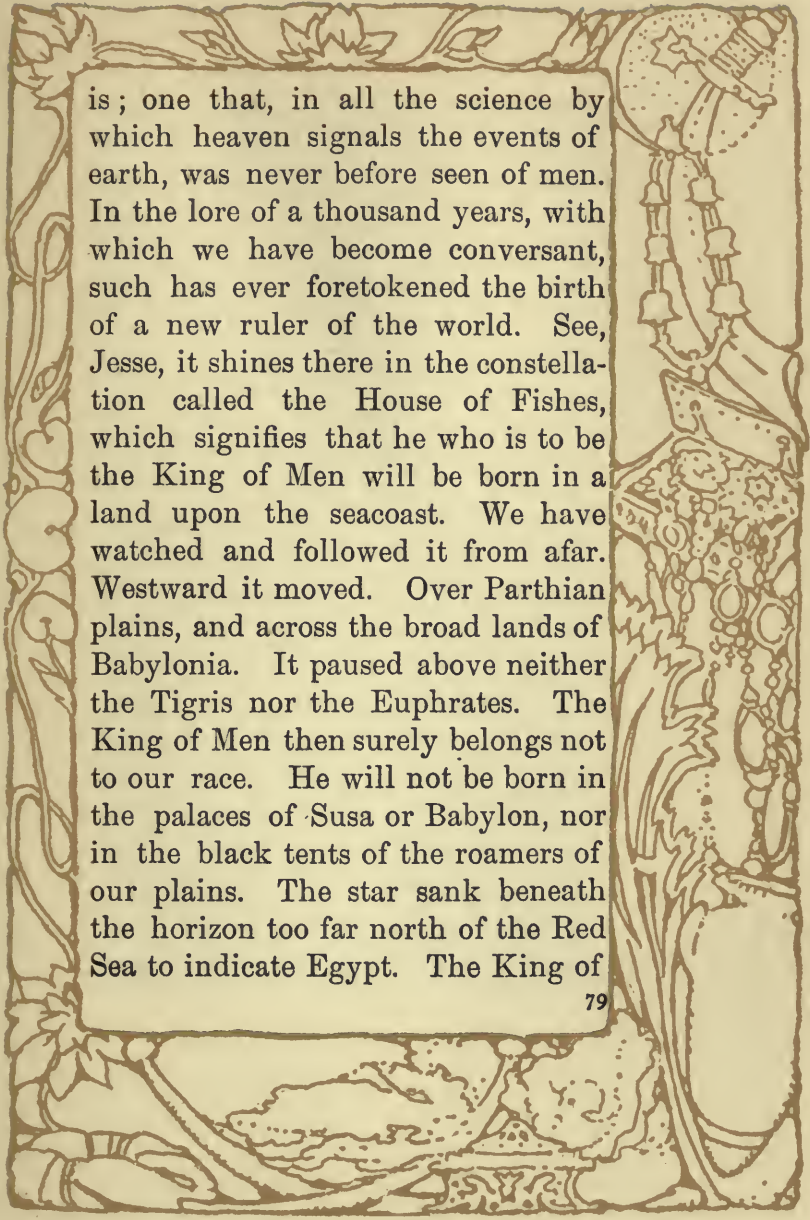
shall come He that shall have dominion."

The Persians in quick excitement went out to where the shepherd was standing.

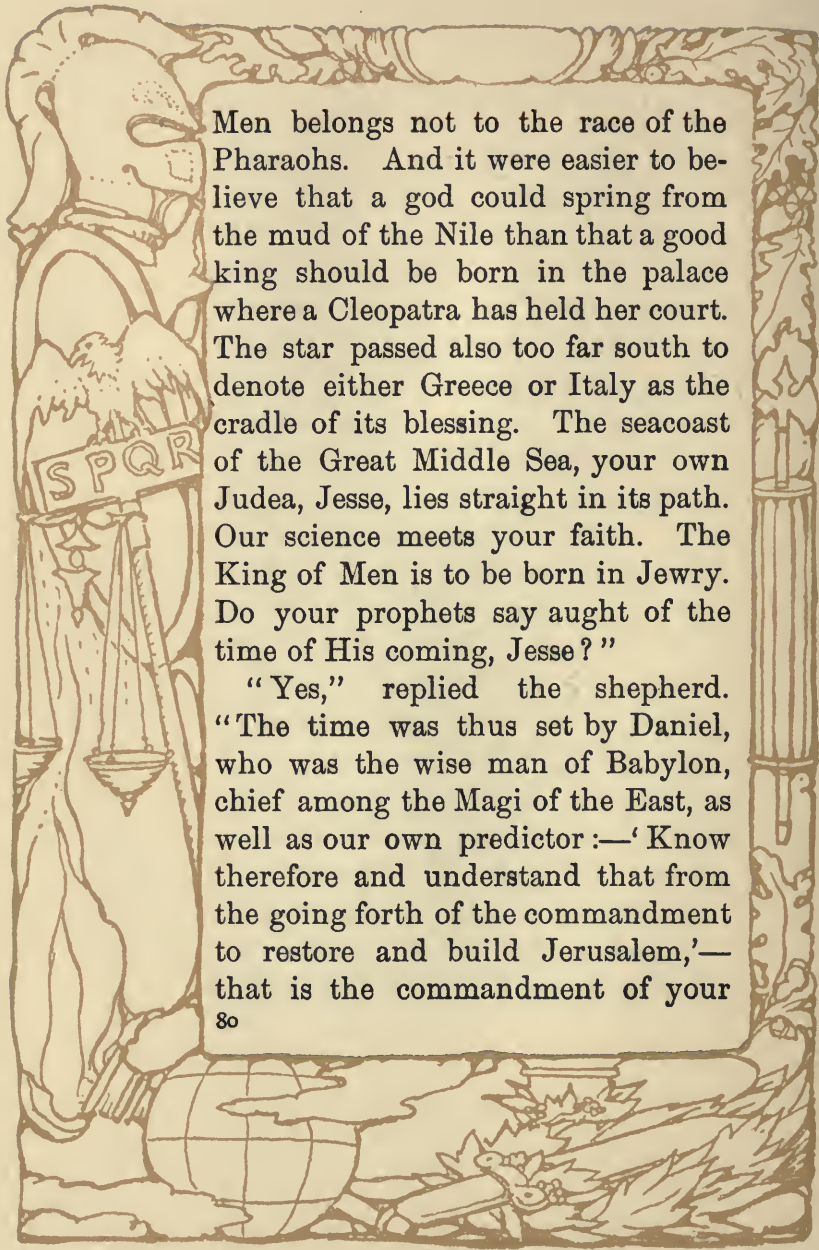
"A star!" they cried. "See you a new star, Jesse?"

"Aye, there is a strange sheep in the flock of the sky. I have never before noted yonder one with wool of flame. But God can make new stars as when once He said 'let there be light!' and all the heavens blazed with them. I was only repeating the prediction of Balaam, son of Peor. But alas! if the star out of Jacob, the star of Israel's hope, has risen, it is still covered with clouds and darkness."

"Say not so, Jesse," cried Gaspar, throwing his arm about the shepherd, and gazing with him skyward. "We, too, have seen this strange star in our far eastern home. A new star it



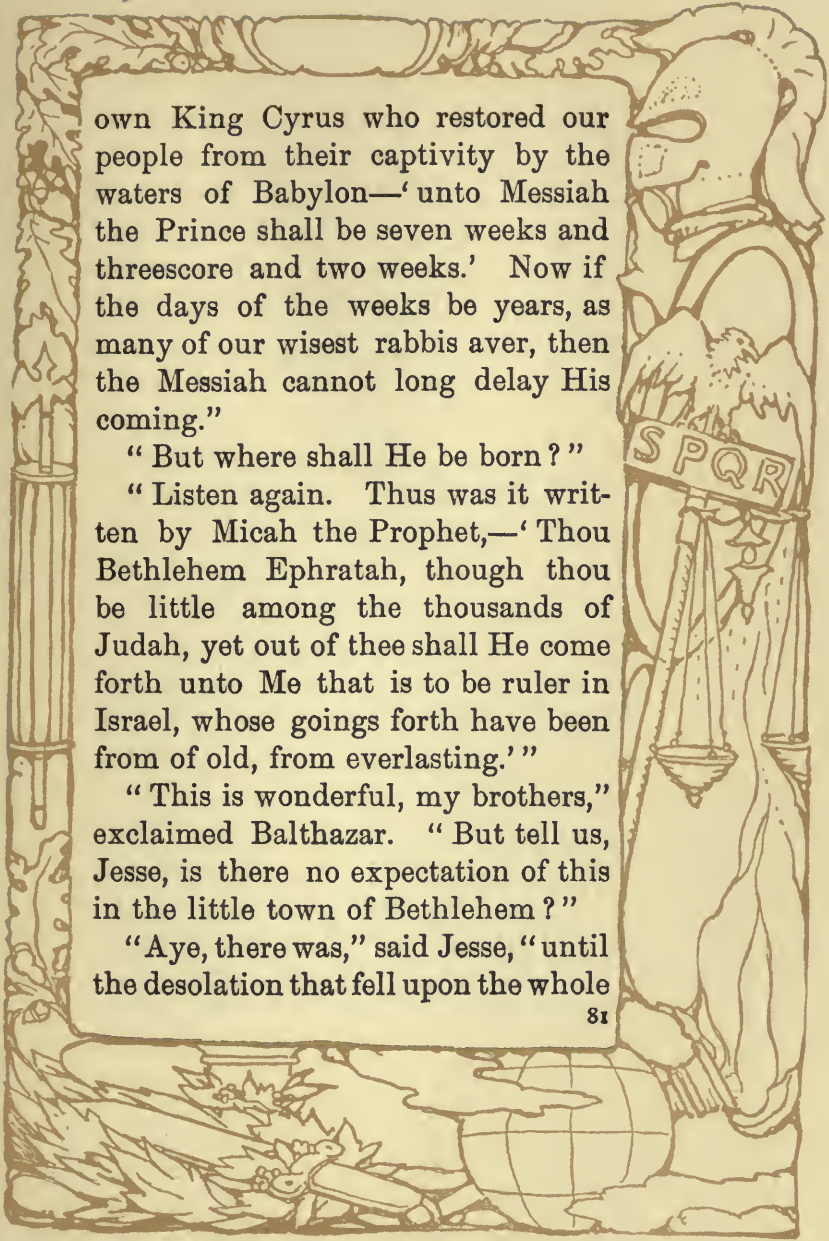
is ; one that, in all the science by which heaven signals the events of earth, was never before seen of men. In the lore of a thousand years, with which we have become conversant, such has ever foretokened the birth of a new ruler of the world. See, Jesse, it shines there in the constellation called the House of Fishes, which signifies that he who is to be the King of Men will be born in a land upon the seacoast. We have watched and followed it from afar. Westward it moved. Over Parthian plains, and across the broad lands of Babylonia. It paused above neither the Tigris nor the Euphrates. The King of Men then surely belongs not to our race. He will not be born in the palaces of Susa or Babylon, nor in the black tents of the roamers of our plains. The star sank beneath the horizon too far north of the Red Sea to indicate Egypt. The King of



Men belongs not to the race of the Pharaohs. And it were easier to believe that a god could spring from the mud of the Nile than that a good king should be born in the palace where a Cleopatra has held her court. The star passed also too far south to denote either Greece or Italy as the cradle of its blessing. The seacoast of the Great Middle Sea, your own Judea, Jesse, lies straight in its path. Our science meets your faith. The King of Men is to be born in Jewry. Do your prophets say aught of the time of His coming, Jesse?"

"Yes," replied the shepherd. "The time was thus set by Daniel, who was the wise man of Babylon, chief among the Magi of the East, as well as our own predictor:—'Know therefore and understand that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem,'—that is the commandment of your

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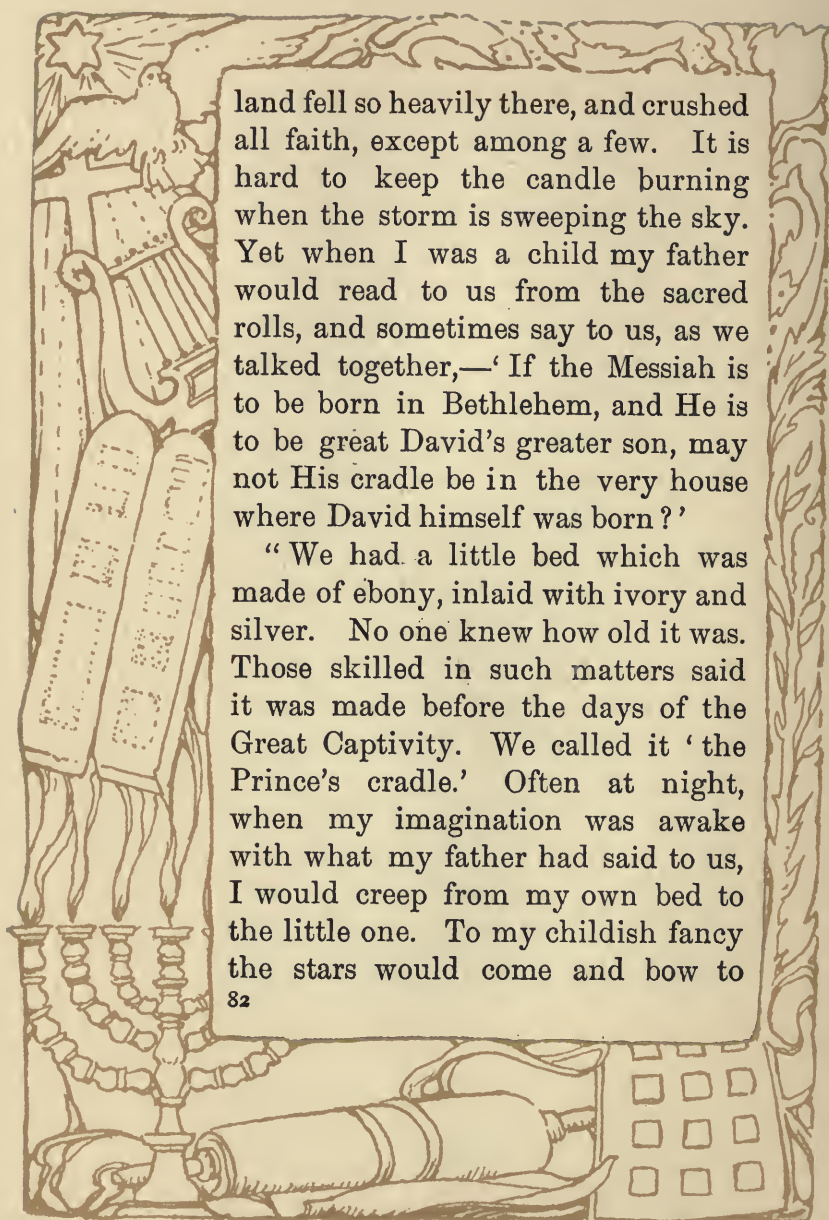
own King Cyrus who restored our people from their captivity by the waters of Babylon—‘unto Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks and threescore and two weeks.’ Now if the days of the weeks be years, as many of our wisest rabbis aver, then the Messiah cannot long delay His coming.”

“But where shall He be born?”

“Listen again. Thus was it written by Micah the Prophet,—‘Thou Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.’”

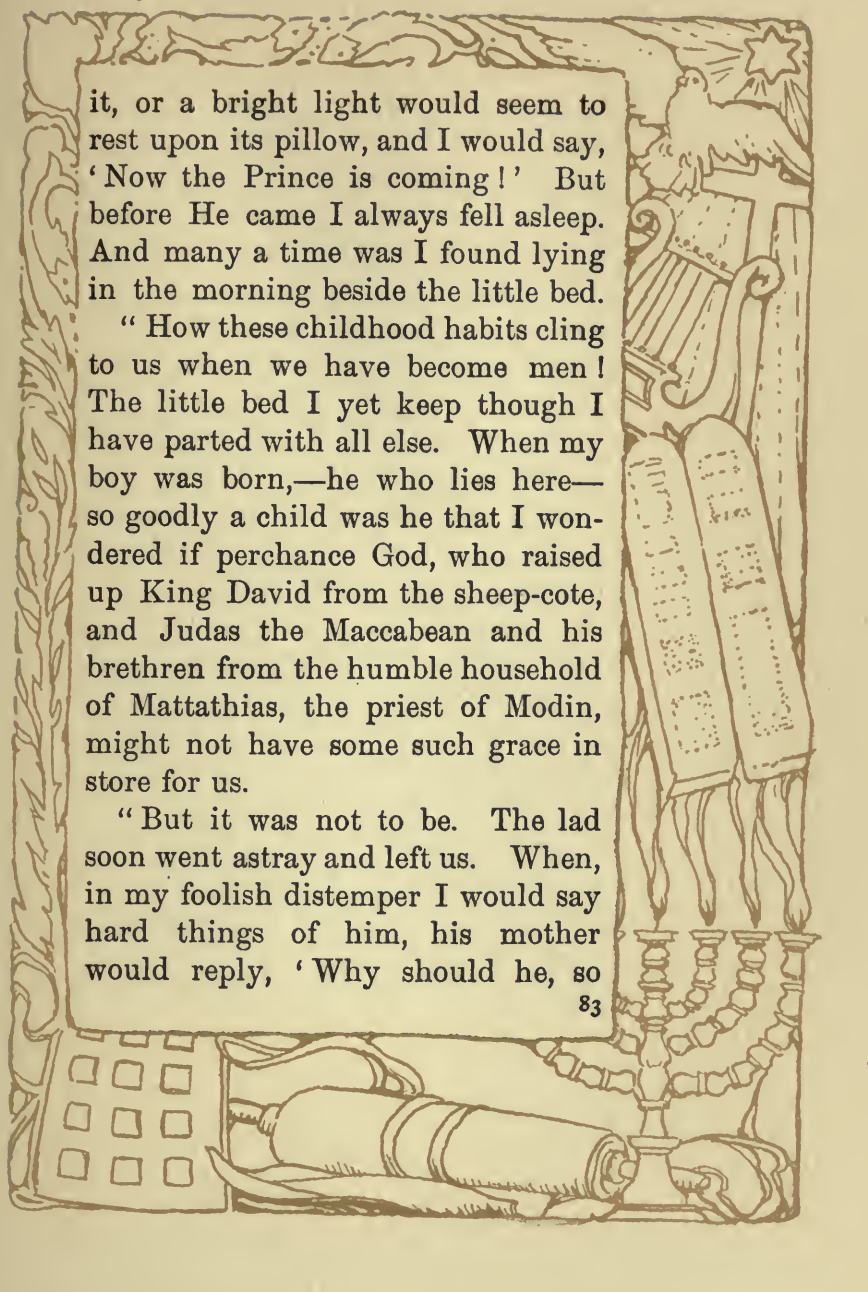
“This is wonderful, my brothers,” exclaimed Balthazar. “But tell us, Jesse, is there no expectation of this in the little town of Bethlehem?”

“Aye, there was,” said Jesse, “until the desolation that fell upon the whole



land fell so heavily there, and crushed all faith, except among a few. It is hard to keep the candle burning when the storm is sweeping the sky. Yet when I was a child my father would read to us from the sacred rolls, and sometimes say to us, as we talked together,—‘ If the Messiah is to be born in Bethlehem, and He is to be great David’s greater son, may not His cradle be in the very house where David himself was born ? ’

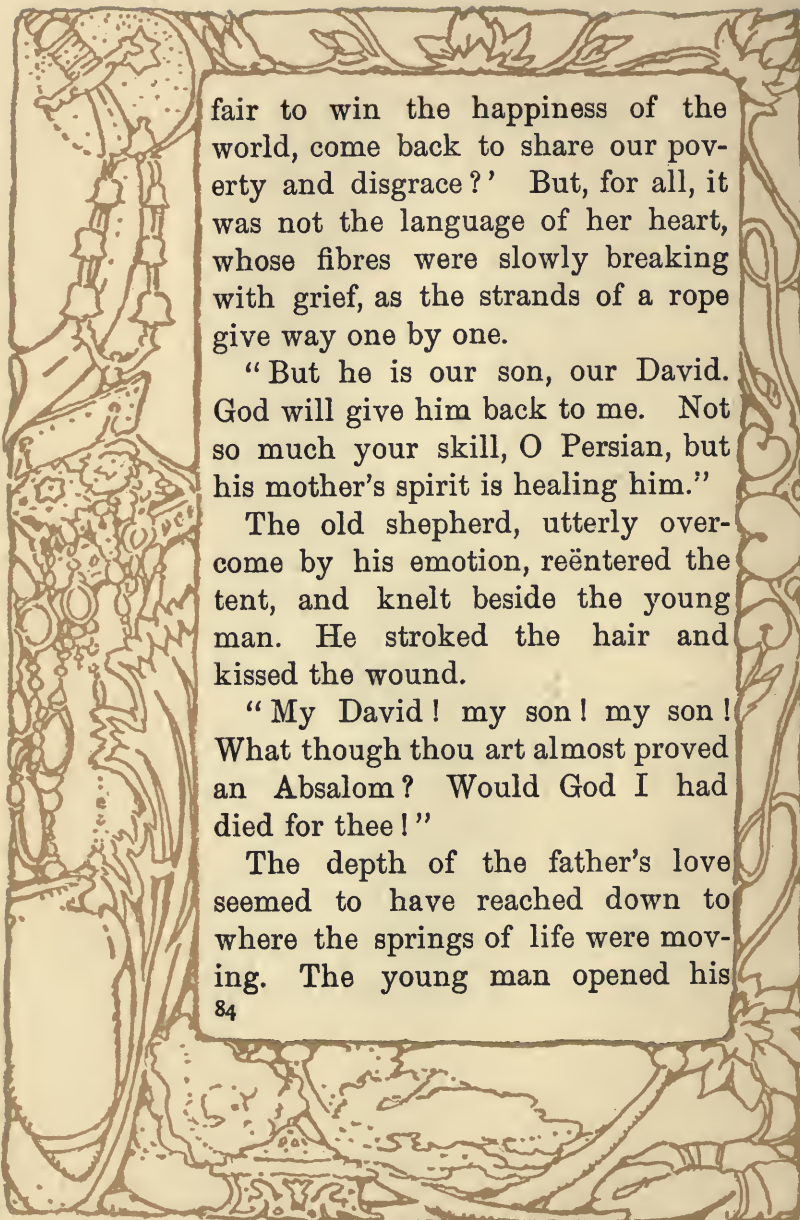
“ We had a little bed which was made of ebony, inlaid with ivory and silver. No one knew how old it was. Those skilled in such matters said it was made before the days of the Great Captivity. We called it ‘ the Prince’s cradle.’ Often at night, when my imagination was awake with what my father had said to us, I would creep from my own bed to the little one. To my childish fancy the stars would come and bow to



it, or a bright light would seem to rest upon its pillow, and I would say, 'Now the Prince is coming!' But before He came I always fell asleep. And many a time was I found lying in the morning beside the little bed.

"How these childhood habits cling to us when we have become men! The little bed I yet keep though I have parted with all else. When my boy was born,—he who lies here—so goodly a child was he that I wondered if perchance God, who raised up King David from the sheep-cote, and Judas the Maccabean and his brethren from the humble household of Mattathias, the priest of Modin, might not have some such grace in store for us.

"But it was not to be. The lad soon went astray and left us. When, in my foolish distemper I would say hard things of him, his mother would reply, 'Why should he, so



fair to win the happiness of the world, come back to share our poverty and disgrace?' But, for all, it was not the language of her heart, whose fibres were slowly breaking with grief, as the strands of a rope give way one by one.

"But he is our son, our David. God will give him back to me. Not so much your skill, O Persian, but his mother's spirit is healing him."

The old shepherd, utterly overcome by his emotion, reëntered the tent, and knelt beside the young man. He stroked the hair and kissed the wound.

"My David! my son! my son! What though thou art almost proved an Absalom? Would God I had died for thee!"

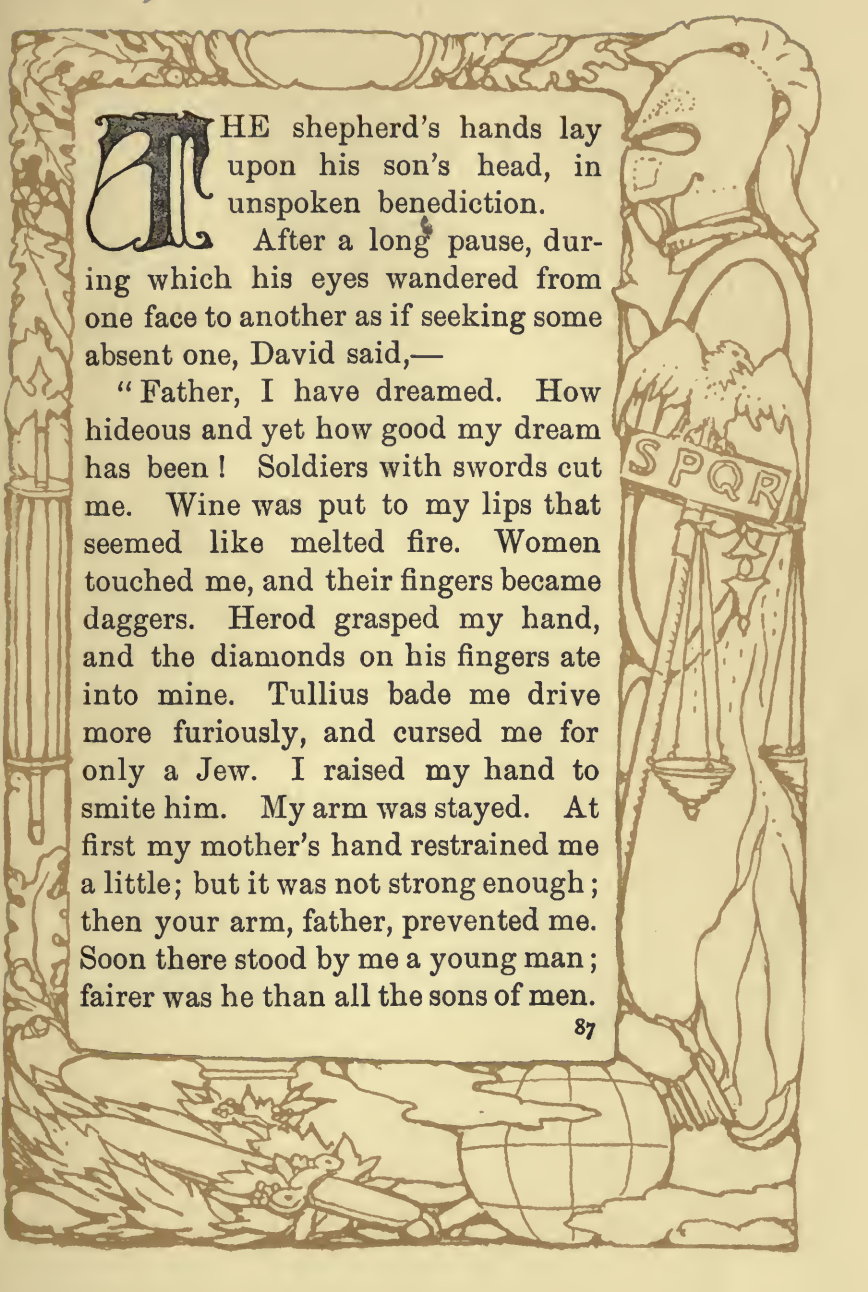
The depth of the father's love seemed to have reached down to where the springs of life were moving. The young man opened his

eyes. There was a moment's vacant stare; then an eager cry,—

“My father! I have come back to you, for I heard you calling. Keep me! Keep me from myself! Give me once more the blessing,—the old blessing of my childhood!”



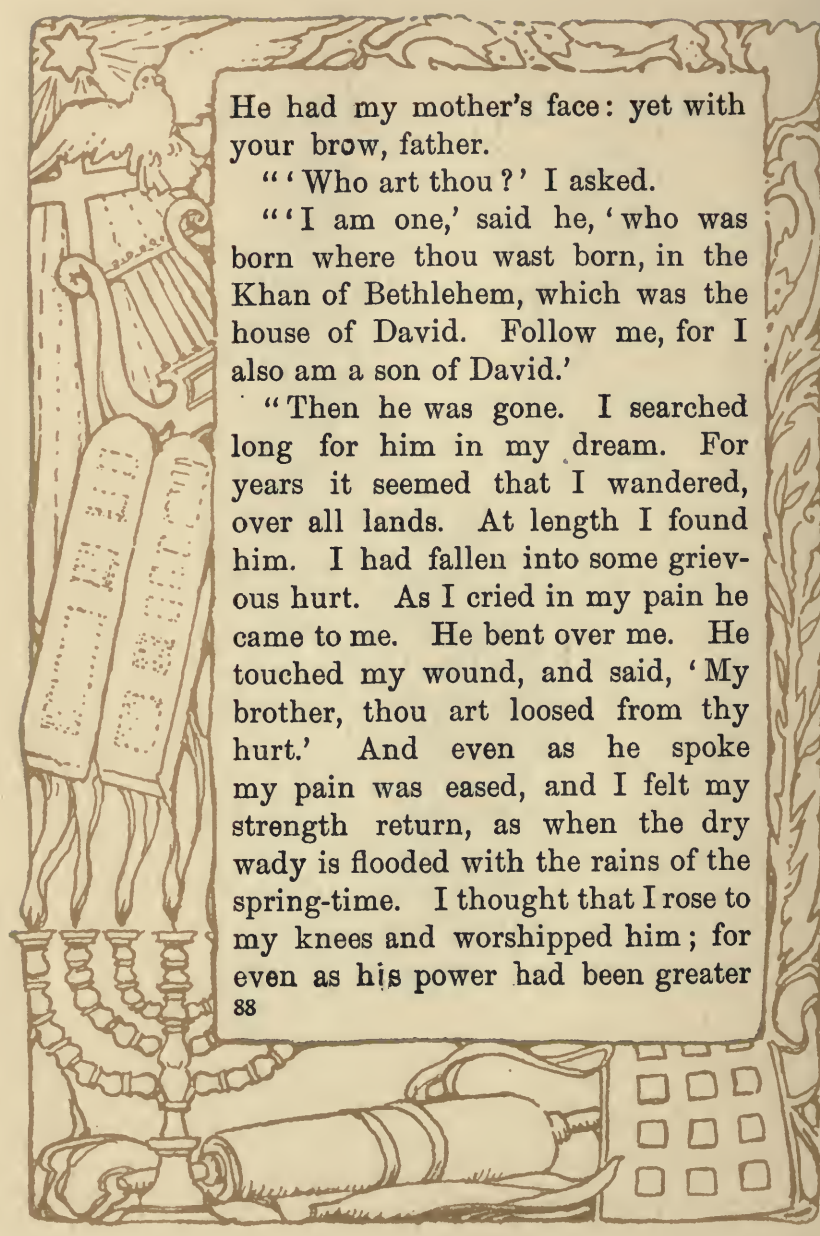




THE shepherd's hands lay
upon his son's head, in
unspoken benediction.

After a long pause, during which his eyes wandered from one face to another as if seeking some absent one, David said,—

“Father, I have dreamed. How hideous and yet how good my dream has been! Soldiers with swords cut me. Wine was put to my lips that seemed like melted fire. Women touched me, and their fingers became daggers. Herod grasped my hand, and the diamonds on his fingers ate into mine. Tullius bade me drive more furiously, and cursed me for only a Jew. I raised my hand to smite him. My arm was stayed. At first my mother's hand restrained me a little; but it was not strong enough; then your arm, father, prevented me. Soon there stood by me a young man; fairer was he than all the sons of men.

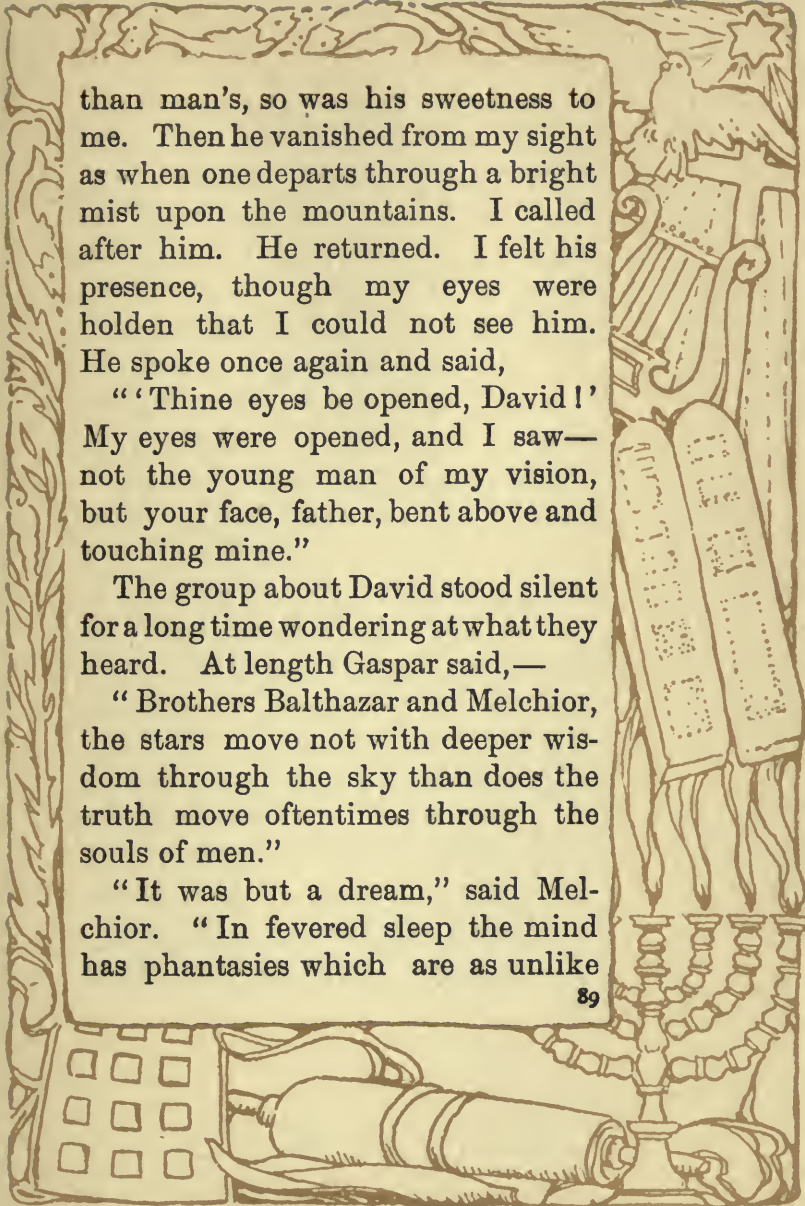


He had my mother's face: yet with
your brow, father.

“‘Who art thou?’ I asked.

“‘I am one,’ said he, ‘who was
born where thou wast born, in the
Khan of Bethlehem, which was the
house of David. Follow me, for I
also am a son of David.’

“Then he was gone. I searched
long for him in my dream. For
years it seemed that I wandered,
over all lands. At length I found
him. I had fallen into some griev-
ous hurt. As I cried in my pain he
came to me. He bent over me. He
touched my wound, and said, ‘My
brother, thou art loosed from thy
hurt.’ And even as he spoke
my pain was eased, and I felt my
strength return, as when the dry
wady is flooded with the rains of the
spring-time. I thought that I rose to
my knees and worshipped him; for
even as his power had been greater



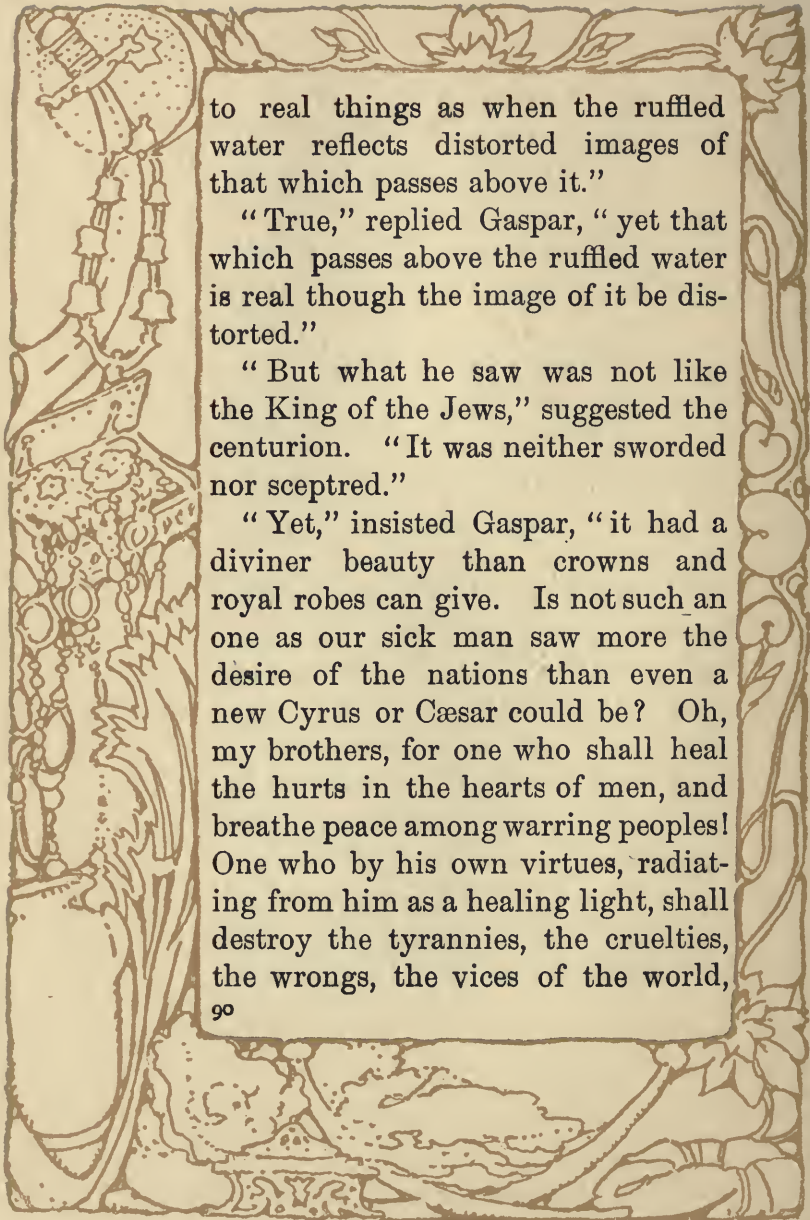
than man's, so was his sweetness to me. Then he vanished from my sight as when one departs through a bright mist upon the mountains. I called after him. He returned. I felt his presence, though my eyes were holden that I could not see him. He spoke once again and said,

“‘Thine eyes be opened, David!’ My eyes were opened, and I saw—not the young man of my vision, but your face, father, bent above and touching mine.”

The group about David stood silent for a long time wondering at what they heard. At length Gaspar said,—

“Brothers Balthazar and Melchior, the stars move not with deeper wisdom through the sky than does the truth move oftentimes through the souls of men.”

“It was but a dream,” said Melchior. “In fevered sleep the mind has phantasies which are as unlike

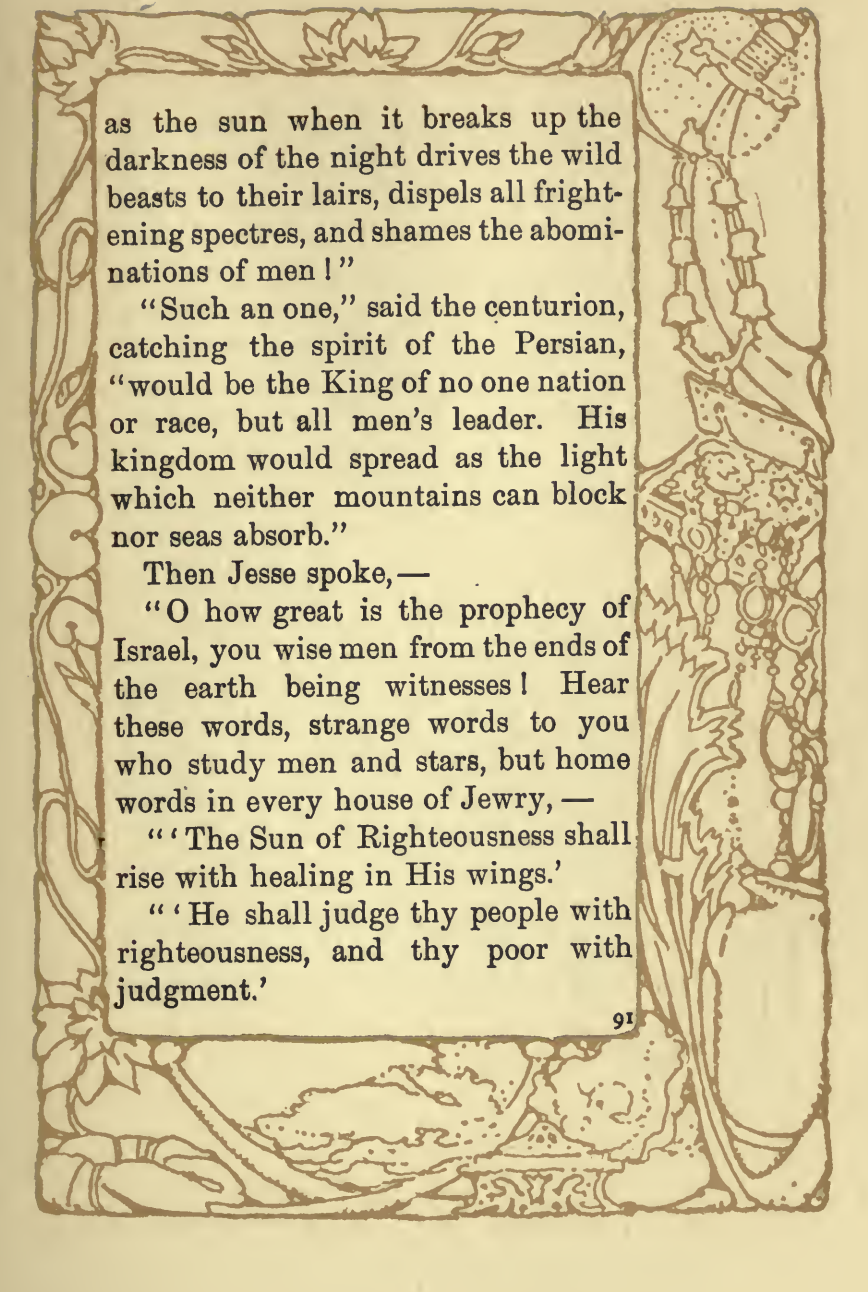


to real things as when the ruffled water reflects distorted images of that which passes above it."

"True," replied Gaspar, "yet that which passes above the ruffled water is real though the image of it be distorted."

"But what he saw was not like the King of the Jews," suggested the centurion. "It was neither sworded nor sceptred."

"Yet," insisted Gaspar, "it had a diviner beauty than crowns and royal robes can give. Is not such an one as our sick man saw more the desire of the nations than even a new Cyrus or Cæsar could be? Oh, my brothers, for one who shall heal the hurts in the hearts of men, and breathe peace among warring peoples! One who by his own virtues, radiating from him as a healing light, shall destroy the tyrannies, the cruelties, the wrongs, the vices of the world,



as the sun when it breaks up the darkness of the night drives the wild beasts to their lairs, dispels all frightening spectres, and shames the abominations of men ! ”


“Such an one,” said the centurion, catching the spirit of the Persian, “would be the King of no one nation or race, but all men’s leader. His kingdom would spread as the light which neither mountains can block nor seas absorb.”

Then Jesse spoke, —

“O how great is the prophecy of Israel, you wise men from the ends of the earth being witnesses ! Hear these words, strange words to you who study men and stars, but home words in every house of Jewry, —

“ ‘The Sun of Righteousness shall rise with healing in His wings.’

“ ‘He shall judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with judgment.’



“ ‘He shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor.’

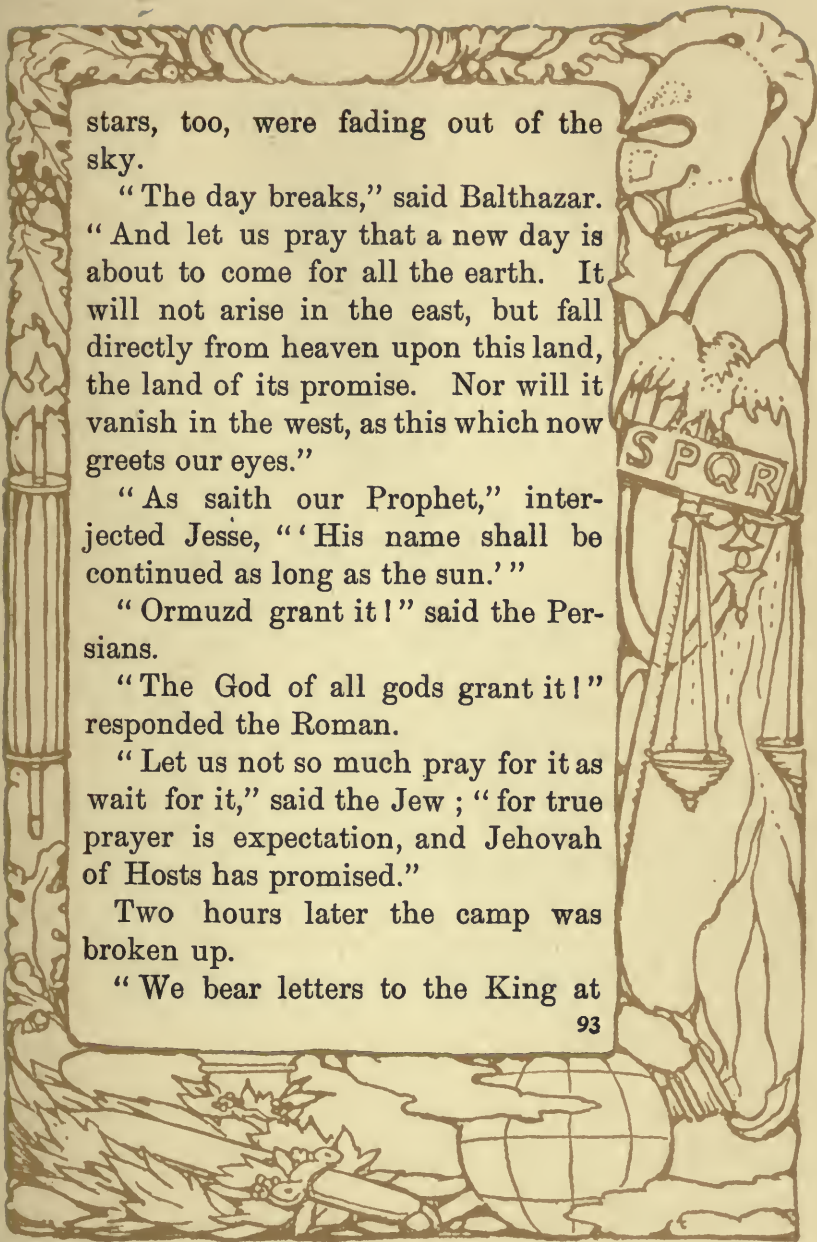
“ ‘Men shall be blessed in Him : all nations shall call Him blessed.’

“ And when the King of Men shall come His royal proclamation shall not count the provinces He has conquered, nor boast the slaves He chains to His chariot, but, as saith Esaias our Prophet,—

“ ‘The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek; He hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.’ ”

“ Marvellous words ! ” said Gaspar. “ The prophecy of no man but of humanity.”

The camp-fire had died down, for none thought to replenish it. The



stars, too, were fading out of the sky.

"The day breaks," said Balthazar. "And let us pray that a new day is about to come for all the earth. It will not arise in the east, but fall directly from heaven upon this land, the land of its promise. Nor will it vanish in the west, as this which now greets our eyes."

"As saith our Prophet," interjected Jesse, "'His name shall be continued as long as the sun.'"

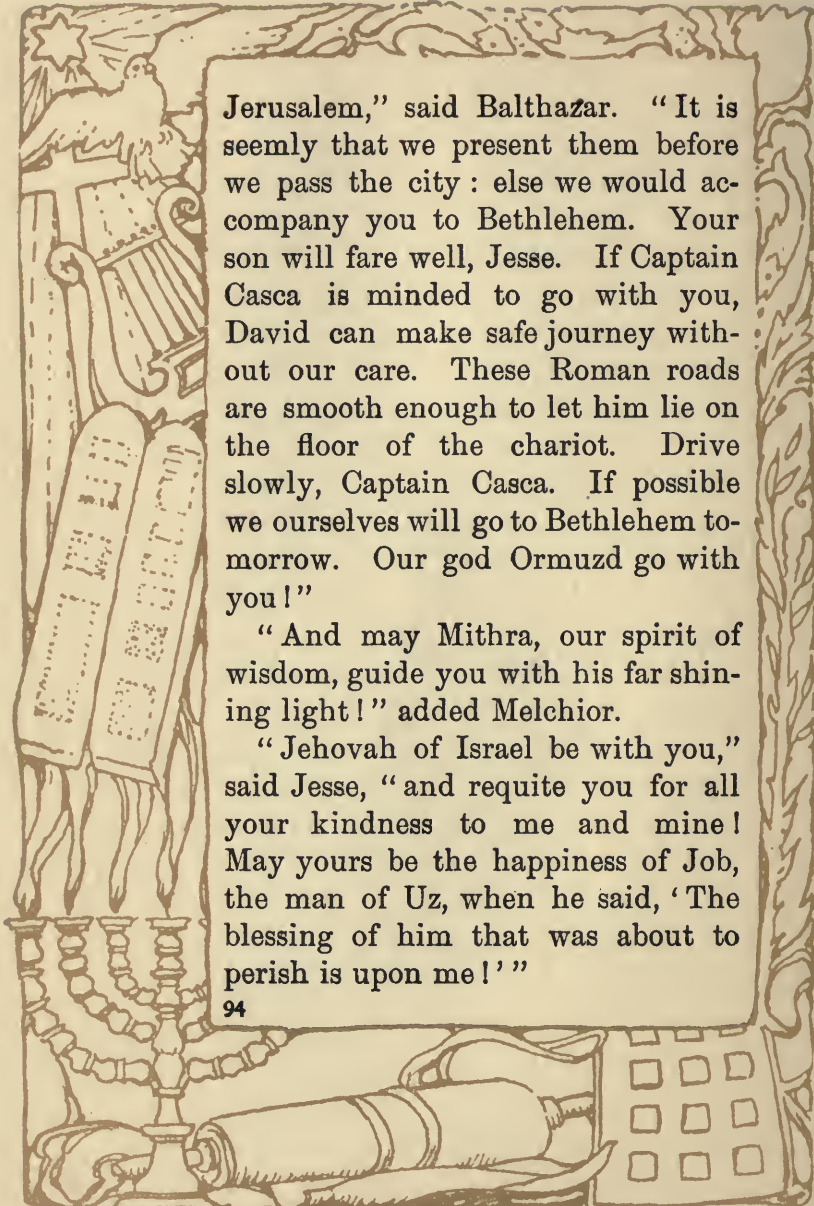
"Ormuzd grant it!" said the Persians.

"The God of all gods grant it!" responded the Roman.

"Let us not so much pray for it as wait for it," said the Jew; "for true prayer is expectation, and Jehovah of Hosts has promised."

Two hours later the camp was broken up.

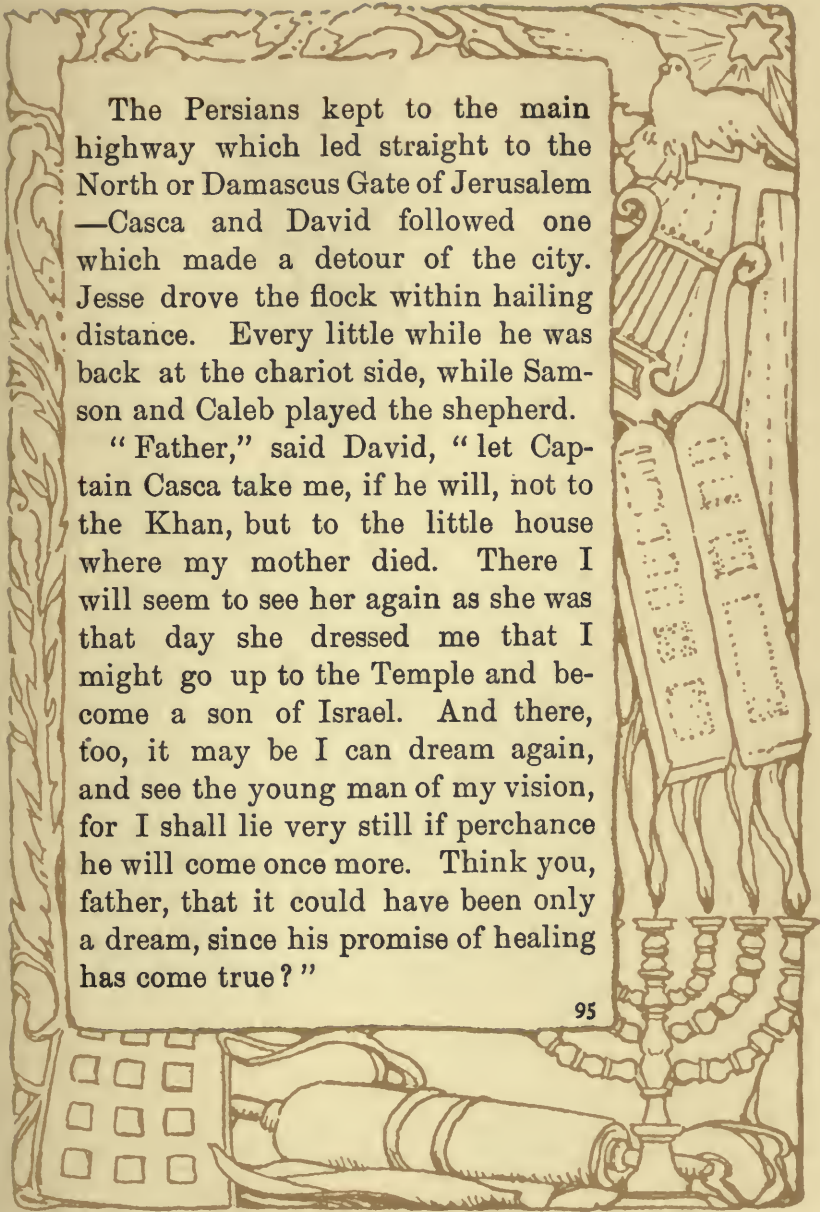
"We bear letters to the King at



Jerusalem," said Balthazar. "It is seemly that we present them before we pass the city : else we would accompany you to Bethlehem. Your son will fare well, Jesse. If Captain Casca is minded to go with you, David can make safe journey without our care. These Roman roads are smooth enough to let him lie on the floor of the chariot. Drive slowly, Captain Casca. If possible we ourselves will go to Bethlehem tomorrow. Our god Ormuzd go with you !"

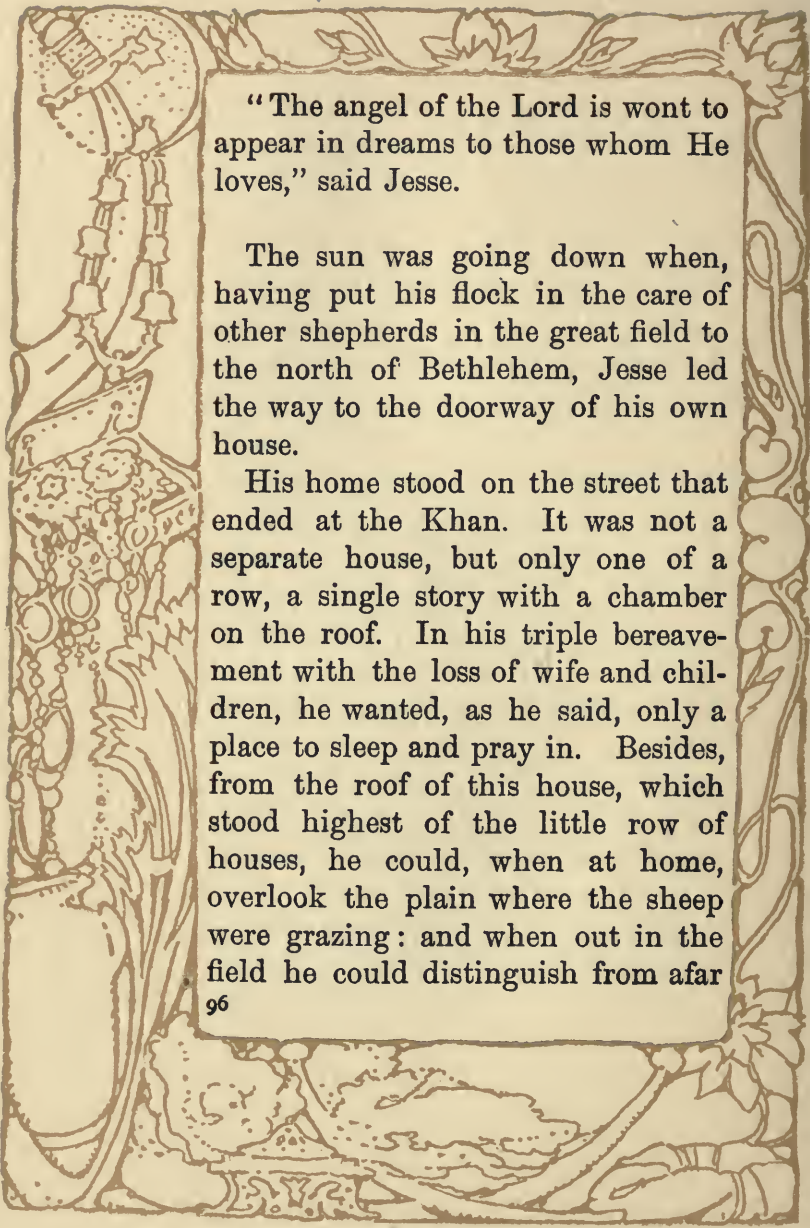
"And may Mithra, our spirit of wisdom, guide you with his far shining light !" added Melchior.

"Jehovah of Israel be with you," said Jesse, "and requite you for all your kindness to me and mine ! May yours be the happiness of Job, the man of Uz, when he said, 'The blessing of him that was about to perish is upon me !' "



The Persians kept to the main highway which led straight to the North or Damascus Gate of Jerusalem—Casca and David followed one which made a detour of the city. Jesse drove the flock within hailing distance. Every little while he was back at the chariot side, while Samson and Caleb played the shepherd.

“Father,” said David, “let Captain Casca take me, if he will, not to the Khan, but to the little house where my mother died. There I will seem to see her again as she was that day she dressed me that I might go up to the Temple and become a son of Israel. And there, too, it may be I can dream again, and see the young man of my vision, for I shall lie very still if perchance he will come once more. Think you, father, that it could have been only a dream, since his promise of healing has come true?”



“The angel of the Lord is wont to appear in dreams to those whom He loves,” said Jesse.

The sun was going down when, having put his flock in the care of other shepherds in the great field to the north of Bethlehem, Jesse led the way to the doorway of his own house.

His home stood on the street that ended at the Khan. It was not a separate house, but only one of a row, a single story with a chamber on the roof. In his triple bereavement with the loss of wife and children, he wanted, as he said, only a place to sleep and pray in. Besides, from the roof of this house, which stood highest of the little row of houses, he could, when at home, overlook the plain where the sheep were grazing: and when out in the field he could distinguish from afar

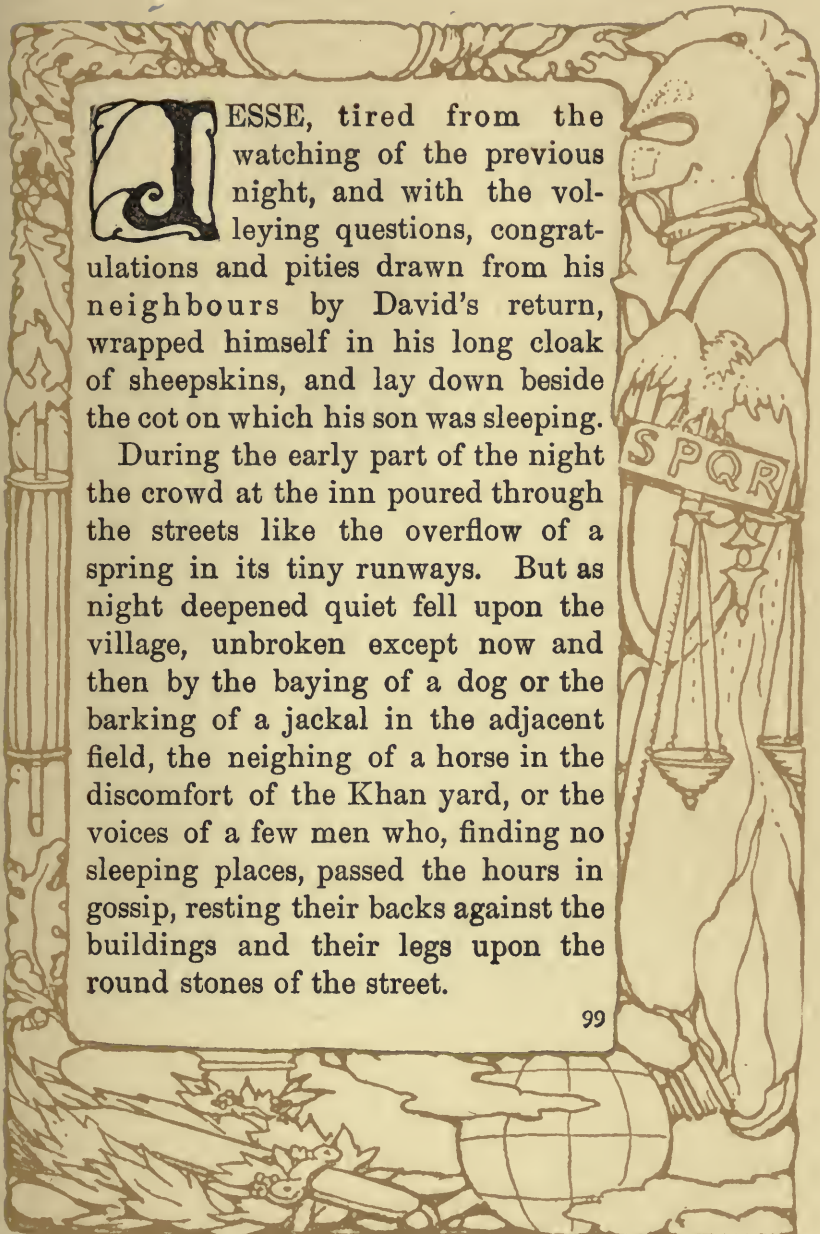
this spot where his home altar still burned, though only like a coal in the ashes.

Many neighbourly hands gave help as David was carried from the chariot up the steps that climbed the house-side to the roof; and soon the wearied man was sleeping in what had been the second home of his childhood.

The centurion drove on to the Khan.

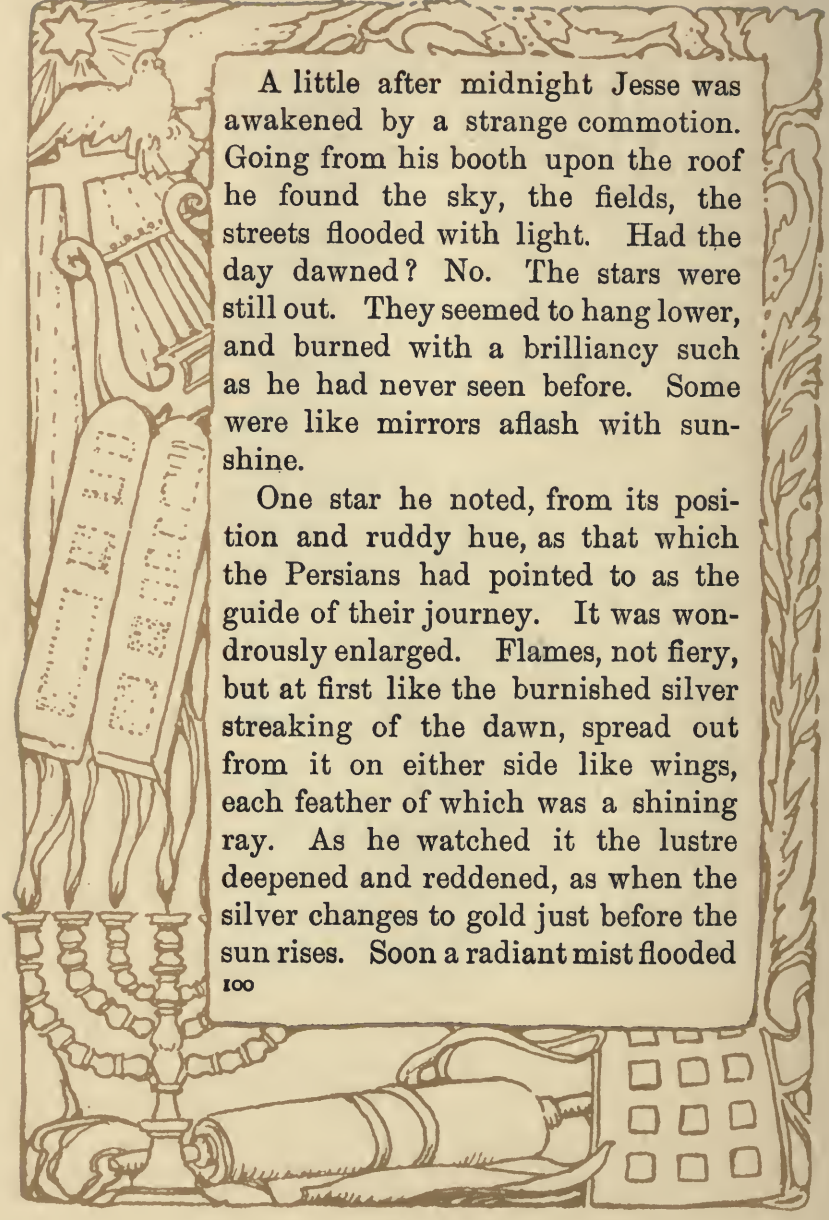






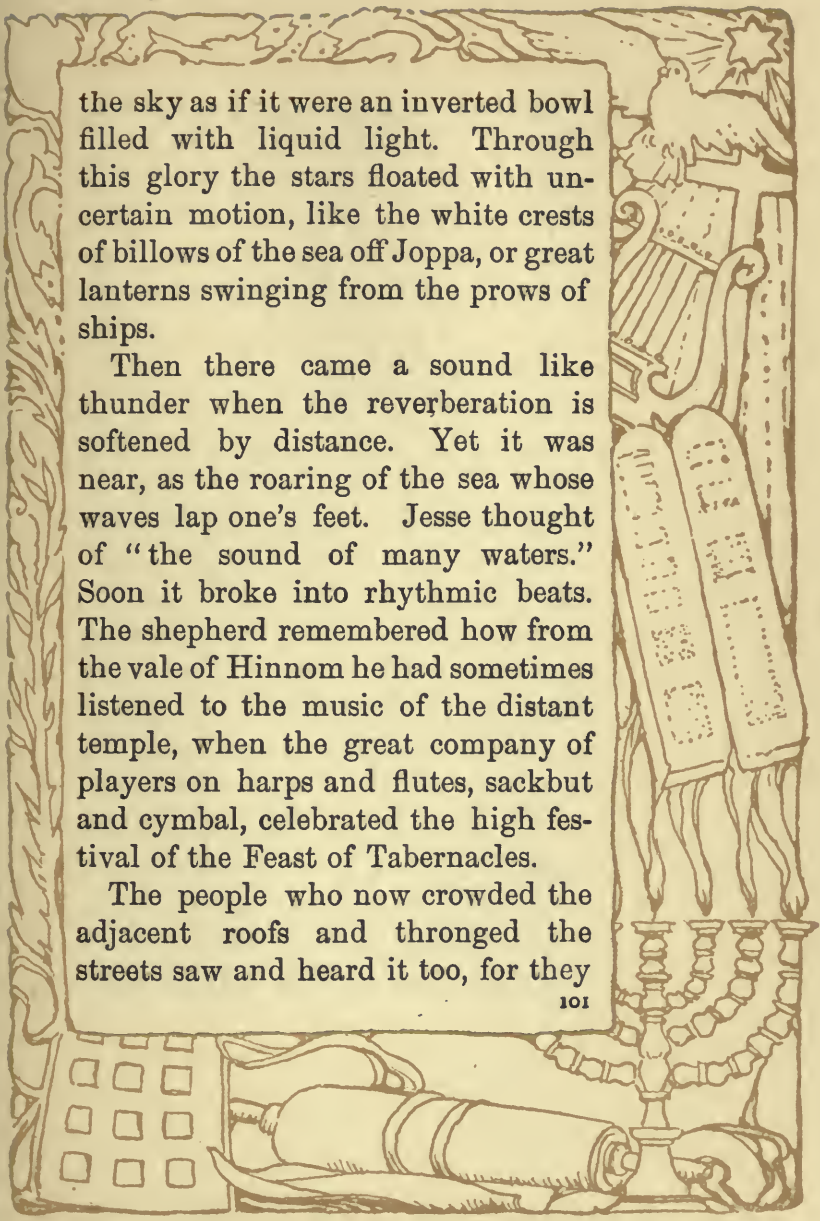
AESSE, tired from the watching of the previous night, and with the volleying questions, congratulations and pities drawn from his neighbours by David's return, wrapped himself in his long cloak of sheepskins, and lay down beside the cot on which his son was sleeping.

During the early part of the night the crowd at the inn poured through the streets like the overflow of a spring in its tiny runways. But as night deepened quiet fell upon the village, unbroken except now and then by the baying of a dog or the barking of a jackal in the adjacent field, the neighing of a horse in the discomfort of the Khan yard, or the voices of a few men who, finding no sleeping places, passed the hours in gossip, resting their backs against the buildings and their legs upon the round stones of the street.



A little after midnight Jesse was awakened by a strange commotion. Going from his booth upon the roof he found the sky, the fields, the streets flooded with light. Had the day dawned? No. The stars were still out. They seemed to hang lower, and burned with a brilliancy such as he had never seen before. Some were like mirrors aflash with sunshine.

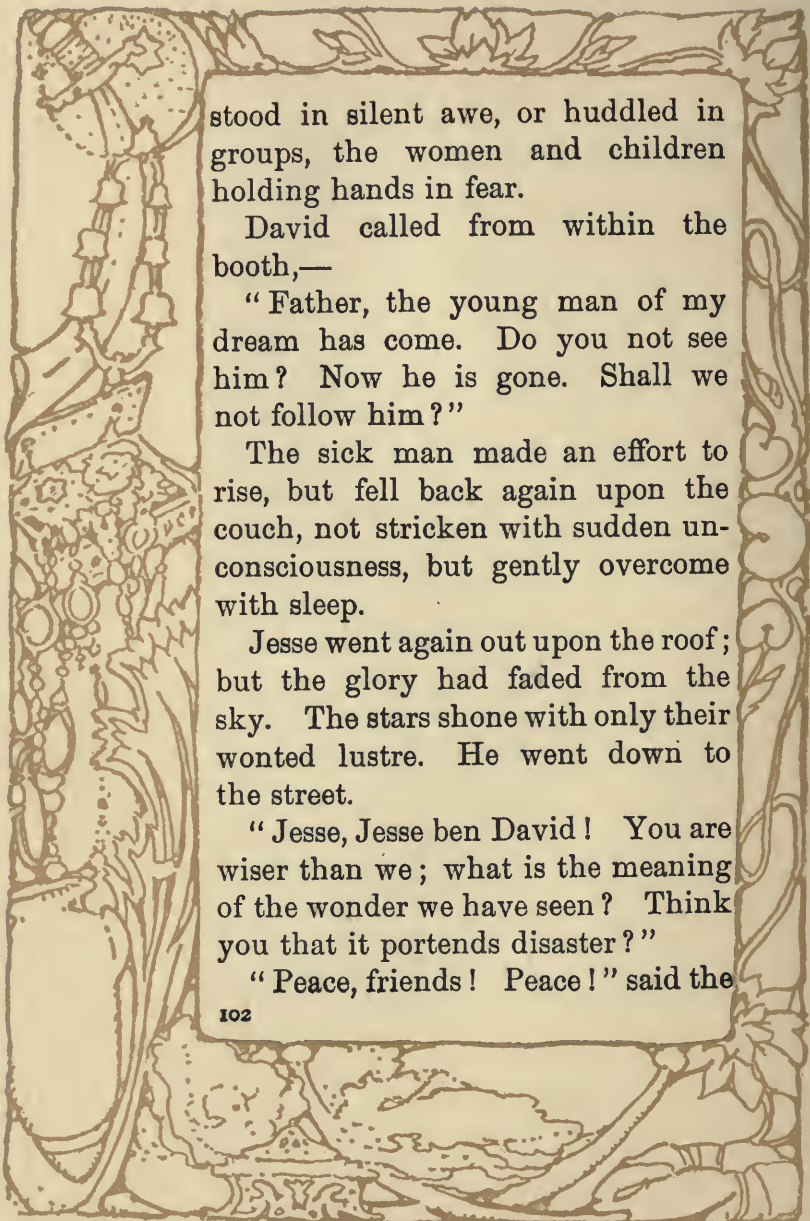
One star he noted, from its position and ruddy hue, as that which the Persians had pointed to as the guide of their journey. It was wondrously enlarged. Flames, not fiery, but at first like the burnished silver streaking of the dawn, spread out from it on either side like wings, each feather of which was a shining ray. As he watched it the lustre deepened and reddened, as when the silver changes to gold just before the sun rises. Soon a radiant mist flooded



the sky as if it were an inverted bowl filled with liquid light. Through this glory the stars floated with uncertain motion, like the white crests of billows of the sea off Joppa, or great lanterns swinging from the prows of ships.

Then there came a sound like thunder when the reverberation is softened by distance. Yet it was near, as the roaring of the sea whose waves lap one's feet. Jesse thought of "the sound of many waters." Soon it broke into rhythmic beats. The shepherd remembered how from the vale of Hinnom he had sometimes listened to the music of the distant temple, when the great company of players on harps and flutes, sackbut and cymbal, celebrated the high festival of the Feast of Tabernacles.

The people who now crowded the adjacent roofs and thronged the streets saw and heard it too, for they



stood in silent awe, or huddled in groups, the women and children holding hands in fear.

David called from within the booth,—

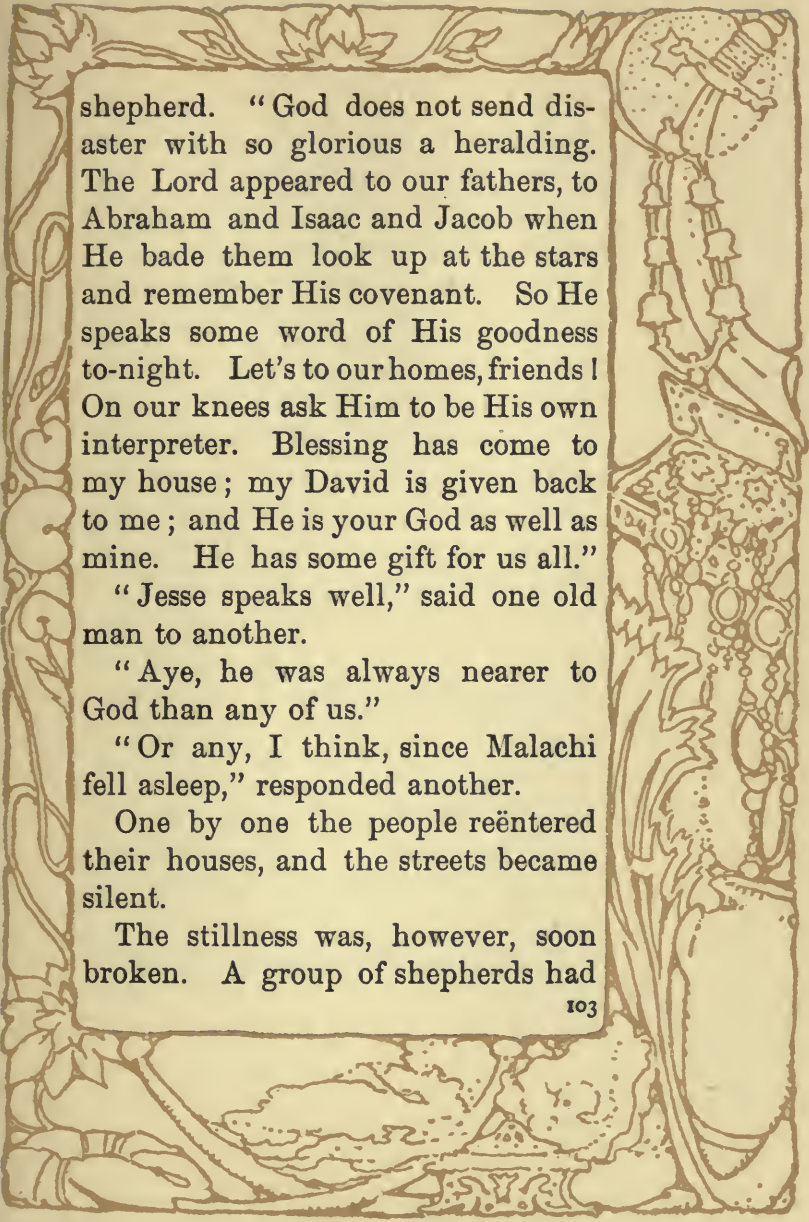
“Father, the young man of my dream has come. Do you not see him? Now he is gone. Shall we not follow him?”

The sick man made an effort to rise, but fell back again upon the couch, not stricken with sudden unconsciousness, but gently overcome with sleep.

Jesse went again out upon the roof; but the glory had faded from the sky. The stars shone with only their wonted lustre. He went down to the street.

“Jesse, Jesse ben David! You are wiser than we; what is the meaning of the wonder we have seen? Think you that it portends disaster?”

“Peace, friends! Peace!” said the



shepherd. "God does not send disaster with so glorious a heralding. The Lord appeared to our fathers, to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob when He bade them look up at the stars and remember His covenant. So He speaks some word of His goodness to-night. Let's to our homes, friends! On our knees ask Him to be His own interpreter. Blessing has come to my house; my David is given back to me; and He is your God as well as mine. He has some gift for us all."

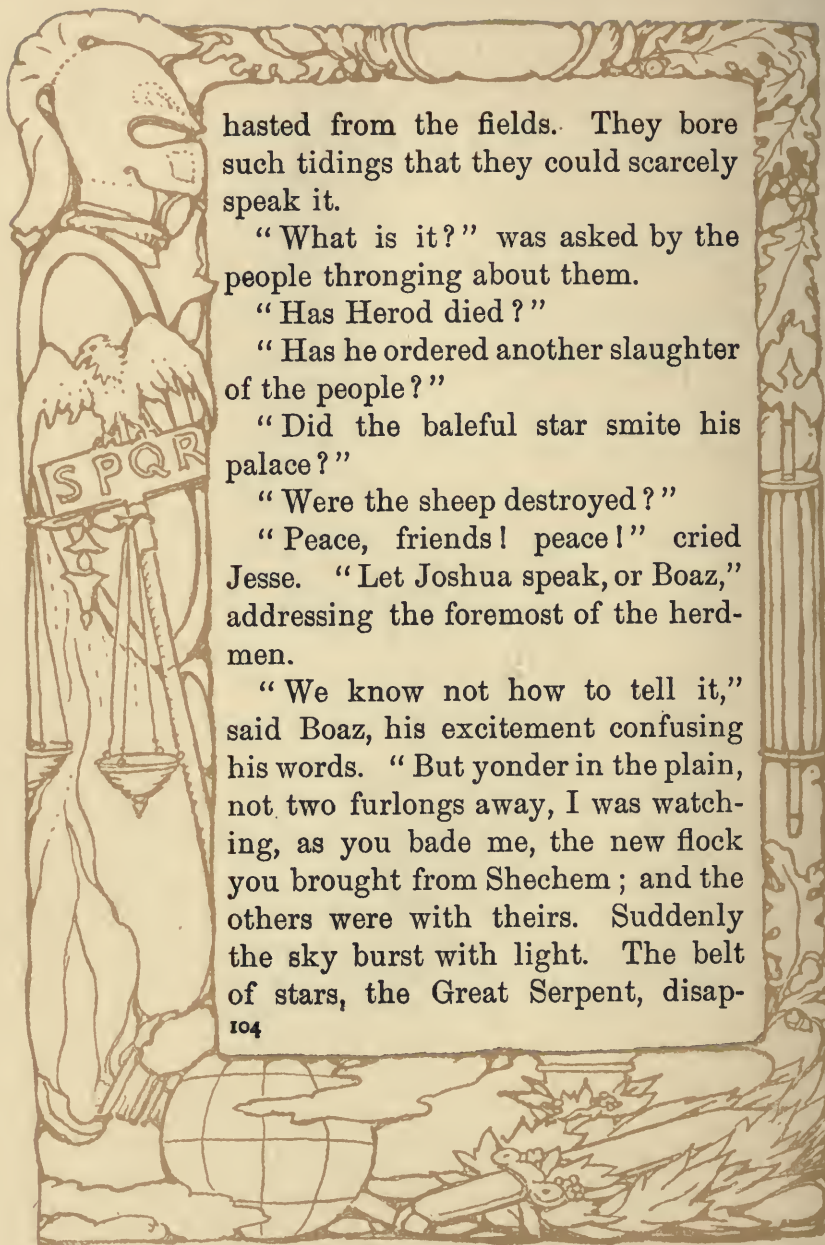
"Jesse speaks well," said one old man to another.

"Aye, he was always nearer to God than any of us."

"Or any, I think, since Malachi fell asleep," responded another.

One by one the people reëntered their houses, and the streets became silent.

The stillness was, however, soon broken. A group of shepherds had



hasted from the fields. They bore such tidings that they could scarcely speak it.

"What is it?" was asked by the people thronging about them.

"Has Herod died?"

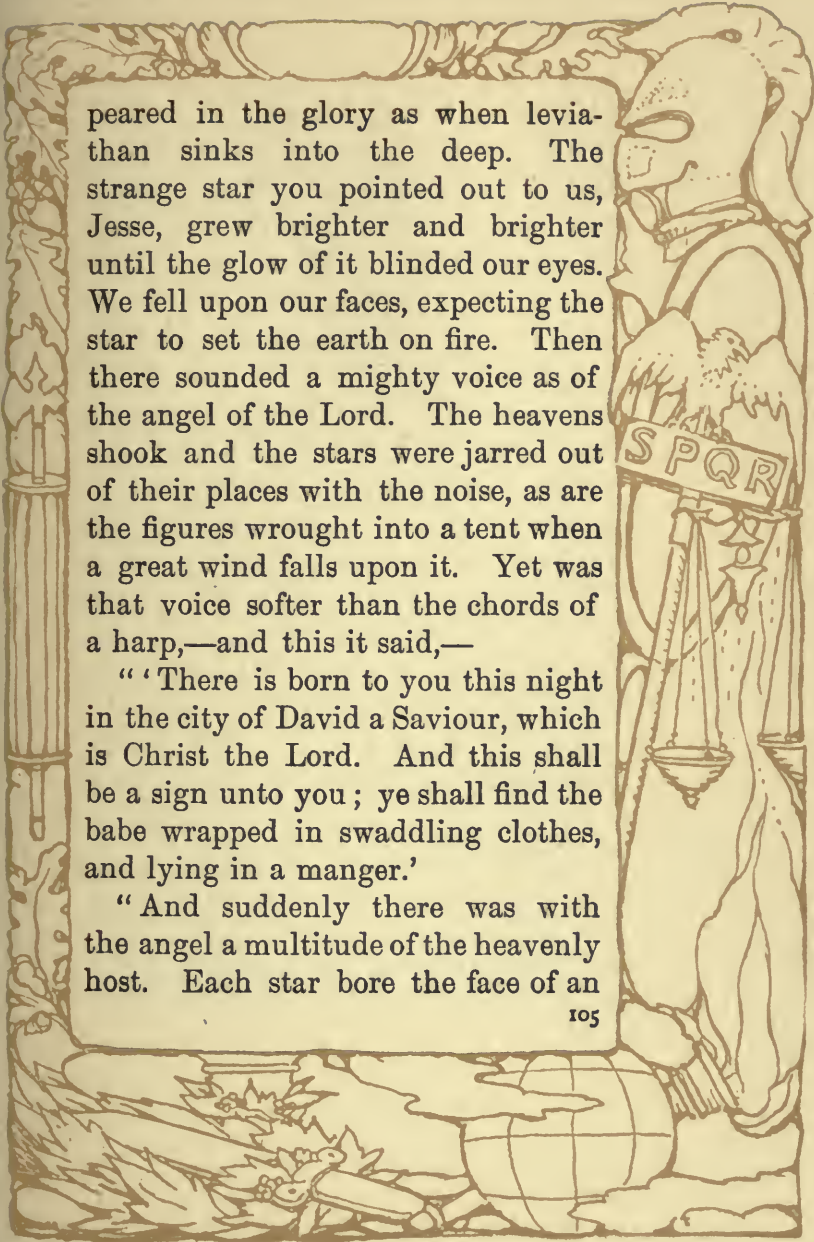
"Has he ordered another slaughter of the people?"

"Did the baleful star smite his palace?"

"Were the sheep destroyed?"

"Peace, friends! peace!" cried Jesse. "Let Joshua speak, or Boaz," addressing the foremost of the herdmen.

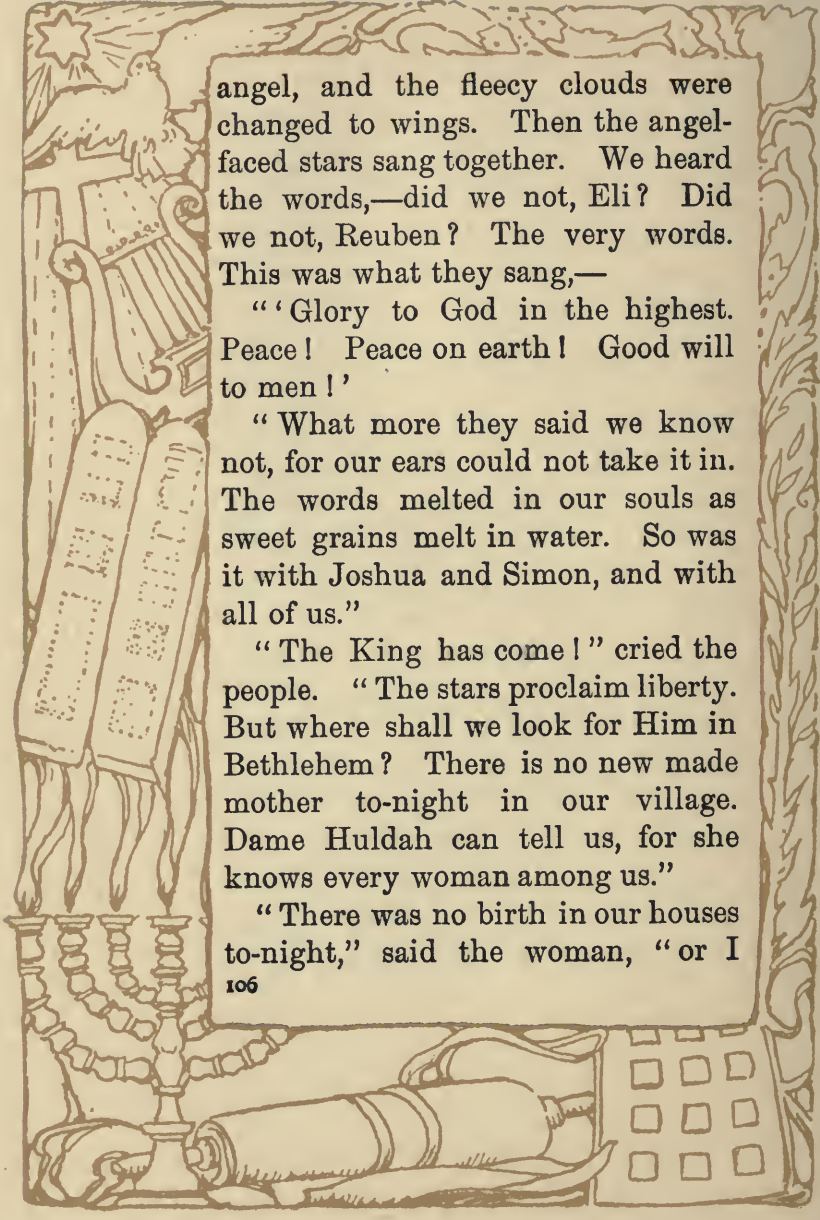
"We know not how to tell it," said Boaz, his excitement confusing his words. "But yonder in the plain, not two furlongs away, I was watching, as you bade me, the new flock you brought from Shechem; and the others were with theirs. Suddenly the sky burst with light. The belt of stars, the Great Serpent, disap-

A decorative border surrounds the text. On the right side, a classical figure, possibly a personification of Justice or a deity, is depicted in profile, wearing a helmet and holding a shield with the letters 'SPQR'. Below the figure is a globe. The bottom of the border features a landscape with a river, trees, and a small building.

peared in the glory as when leviathan sinks into the deep. The strange star you pointed out to us, Jesse, grew brighter and brighter until the glow of it blinded our eyes. We fell upon our faces, expecting the star to set the earth on fire. Then there sounded a mighty voice as of the angel of the Lord. The heavens shook and the stars were jarred out of their places with the noise, as are the figures wrought into a tent when a great wind falls upon it. Yet was that voice softer than the chords of a harp,—and this it said,—

“ ‘There is born to you this night in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you ; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger.’

“And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host. Each star bore the face of an



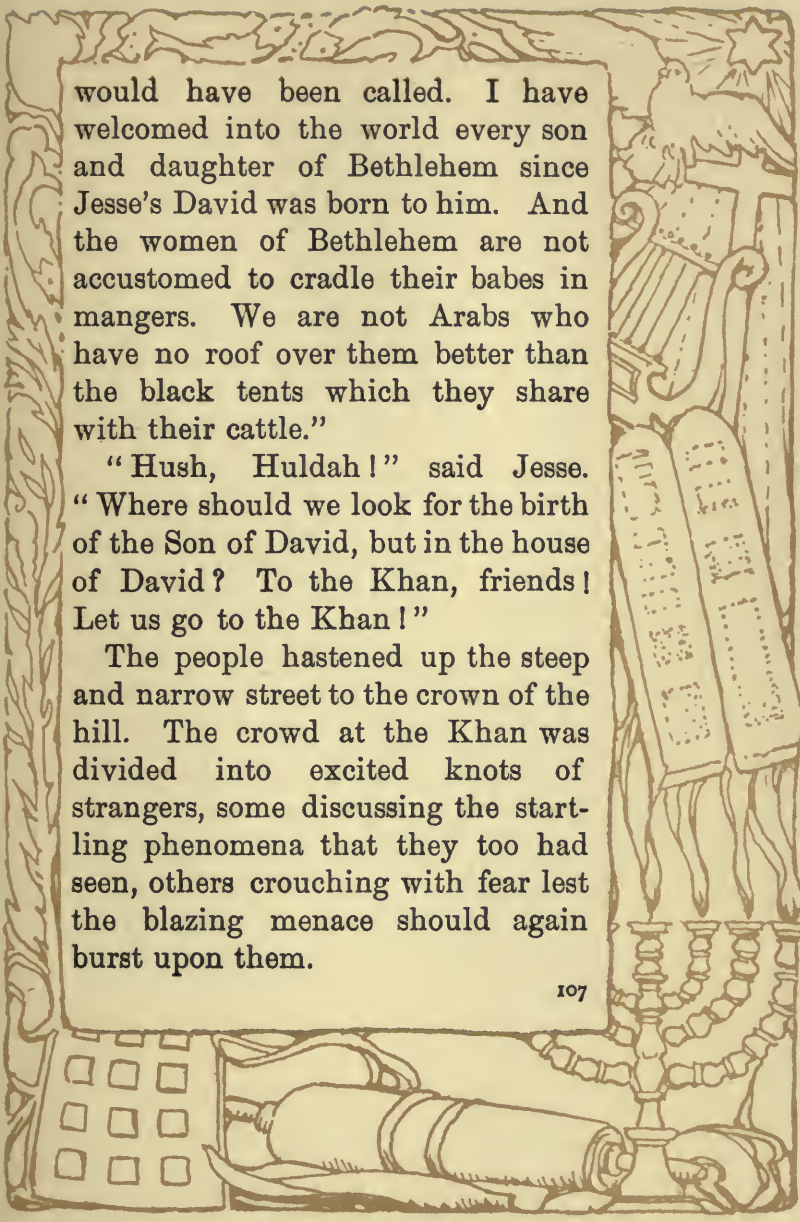
angel, and the fleecy clouds were changed to wings. Then the angel-faced stars sang together. We heard the words,—did we not, Eli? Did we not, Reuben? The very words. This was what they sang,—

“‘Glory to God in the highest. Peace! Peace on earth! Good will to men!’

“What more they said we know not, for our ears could not take it in. The words melted in our souls as sweet grains melt in water. So was it with Joshua and Simon, and with all of us.”

“The King has come!” cried the people. “The stars proclaim liberty. But where shall we look for Him in Bethlehem? There is no new made mother to-night in our village. Dame Huldah can tell us, for she knows every woman among us.”

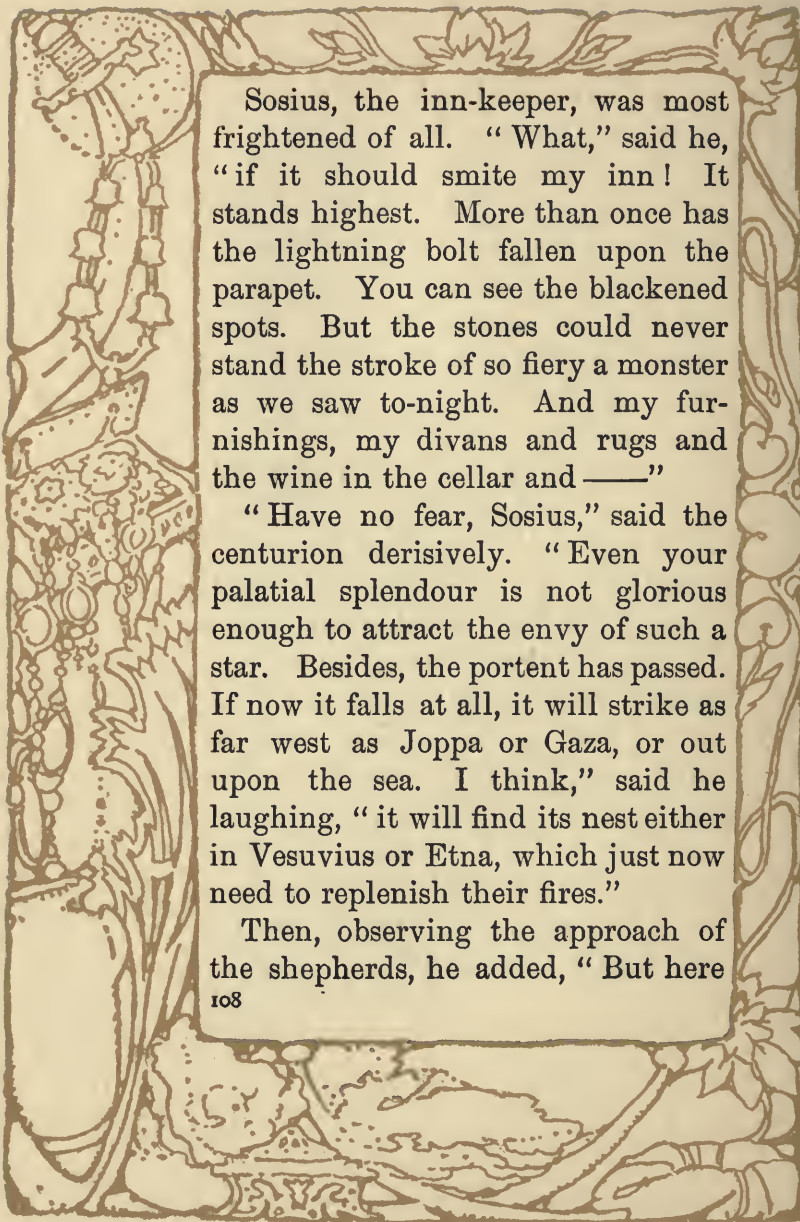
“There was no birth in our houses to-night,” said the woman, “or I



would have been called. I have welcomed into the world every son and daughter of Bethlehem since Jesse's David was born to him. And the women of Bethlehem are not accustomed to cradle their babes in mangers. We are not Arabs who have no roof over them better than the black tents which they share with their cattle."

"Hush, Huldah!" said Jesse. "Where should we look for the birth of the Son of David, but in the house of David? To the Khan, friends! Let us go to the Khan!"

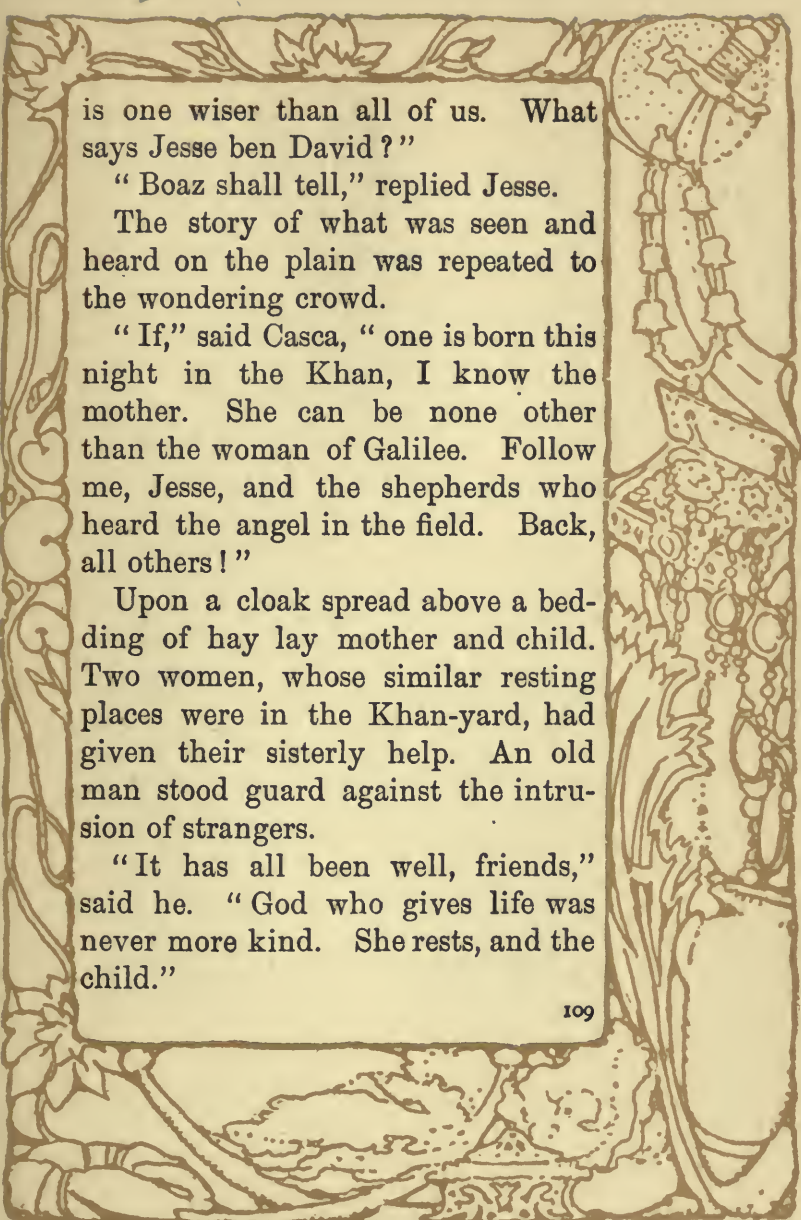
The people hastened up the steep and narrow street to the crown of the hill. The crowd at the Khan was divided into excited knots of strangers, some discussing the startling phenomena that they too had seen, others crouching with fear lest the blazing menace should again burst upon them.



Sosius, the inn-keeper, was most frightened of all. "What," said he, "if it should smite my inn! It stands highest. More than once has the lightning bolt fallen upon the parapet. You can see the blackened spots. But the stones could never stand the stroke of so fiery a monster as we saw to-night. And my furnishings, my divans and rugs and the wine in the cellar and ——"

"Have no fear, Sosius," said the centurion derisively. "Even your palatial splendour is not glorious enough to attract the envy of such a star. Besides, the portent has passed. If now it falls at all, it will strike as far west as Joppa or Gaza, or out upon the sea. I think," said he laughing, "it will find its nest either in Vesuvius or Etna, which just now need to replenish their fires."

Then, observing the approach of the shepherds, he added, "But here



is one wiser than all of us. What says Jesse ben David?"

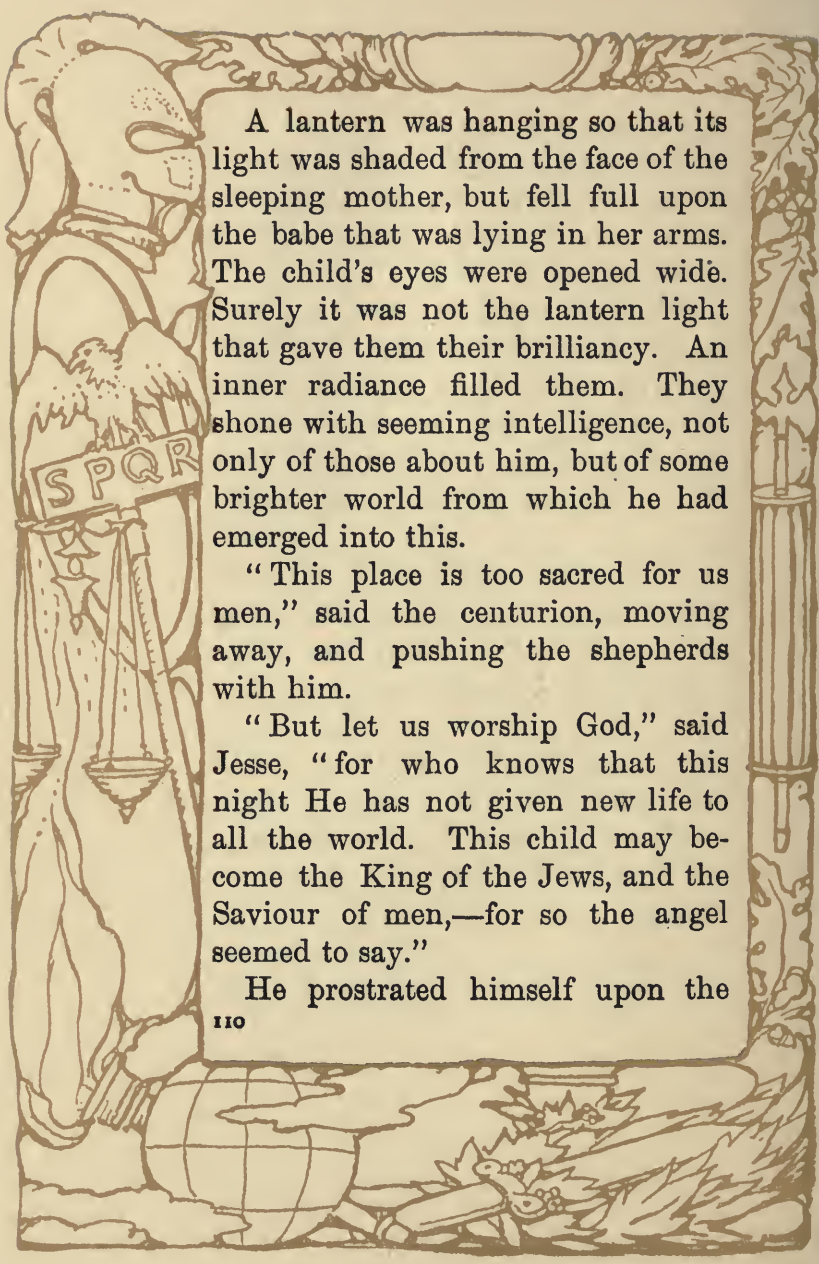
"Boaz shall tell," replied Jesse.

The story of what was seen and heard on the plain was repeated to the wondering crowd.

"If," said Casca, "one is born this night in the Khan, I know the mother. She can be none other than the woman of Galilee. Follow me, Jesse, and the shepherds who heard the angel in the field. Back, all others!"

Upon a cloak spread above a bedding of hay lay mother and child. Two women, whose similar resting places were in the Khan-yard, had given their sisterly help. An old man stood guard against the intrusion of strangers.

"It has all been well, friends," said he. "God who gives life was never more kind. She rests, and the child."

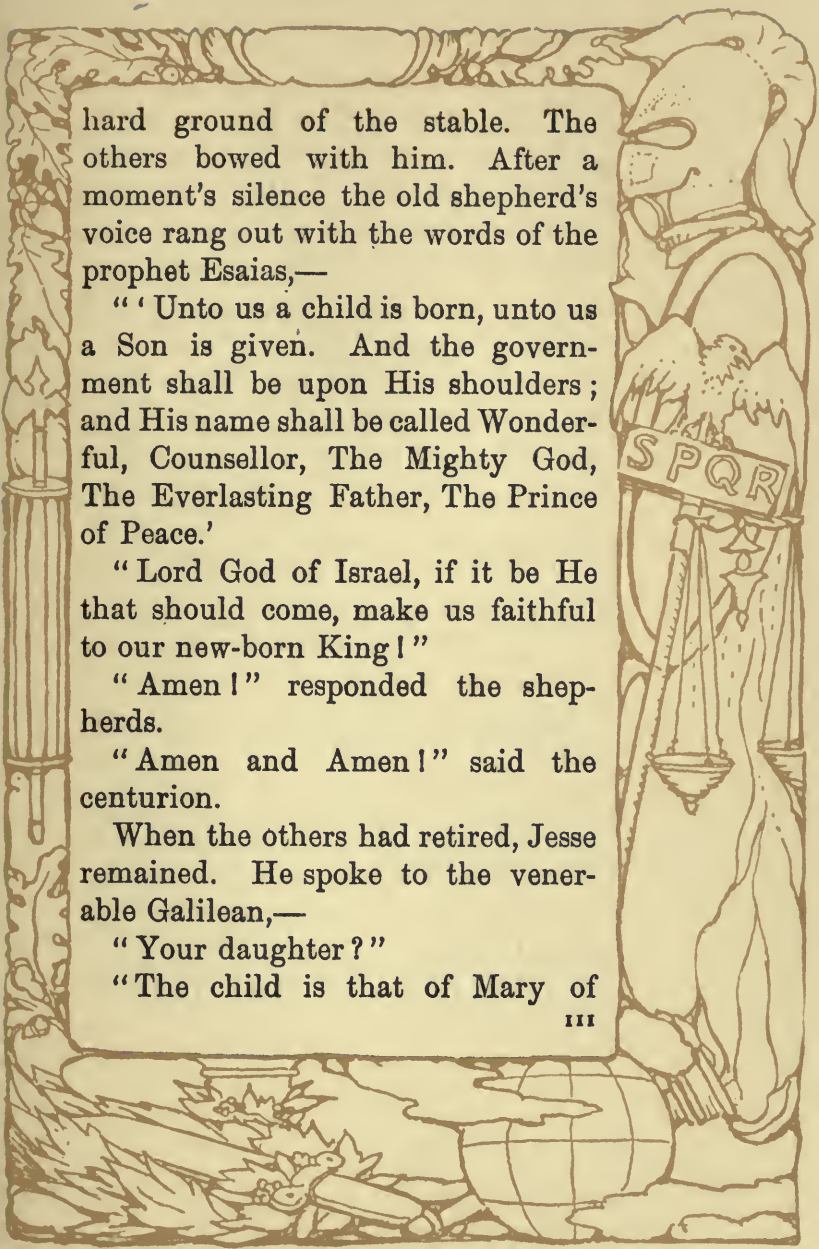


A lantern was hanging so that its light was shaded from the face of the sleeping mother, but fell full upon the babe that was lying in her arms. The child's eyes were opened wide. Surely it was not the lantern light that gave them their brilliancy. An inner radiance filled them. They shone with seeming intelligence, not only of those about him, but of some brighter world from which he had emerged into this.

"This place is too sacred for us men," said the centurion, moving away, and pushing the shepherds with him.

"But let us worship God," said Jesse, "for who knows that this night He has not given new life to all the world. This child may become the King of the Jews, and the Saviour of men,—for so the angel seemed to say."

He prostrated himself upon the

A decorative border surrounds the text. On the right side, there is a classical figure, possibly a personification of Justice or a deity, wearing a helmet and holding a shield with the letters 'SPQR' on it. At the bottom of the border, there is a globe and some foliage.

hard ground of the stable. The others bowed with him. After a moment's silence the old shepherd's voice rang out with the words of the prophet Esaias,—

“ ‘Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given. And the government shall be upon His shoulders; and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.’

“Lord God of Israel, if it be He that should come, make us faithful to our new-born King!”

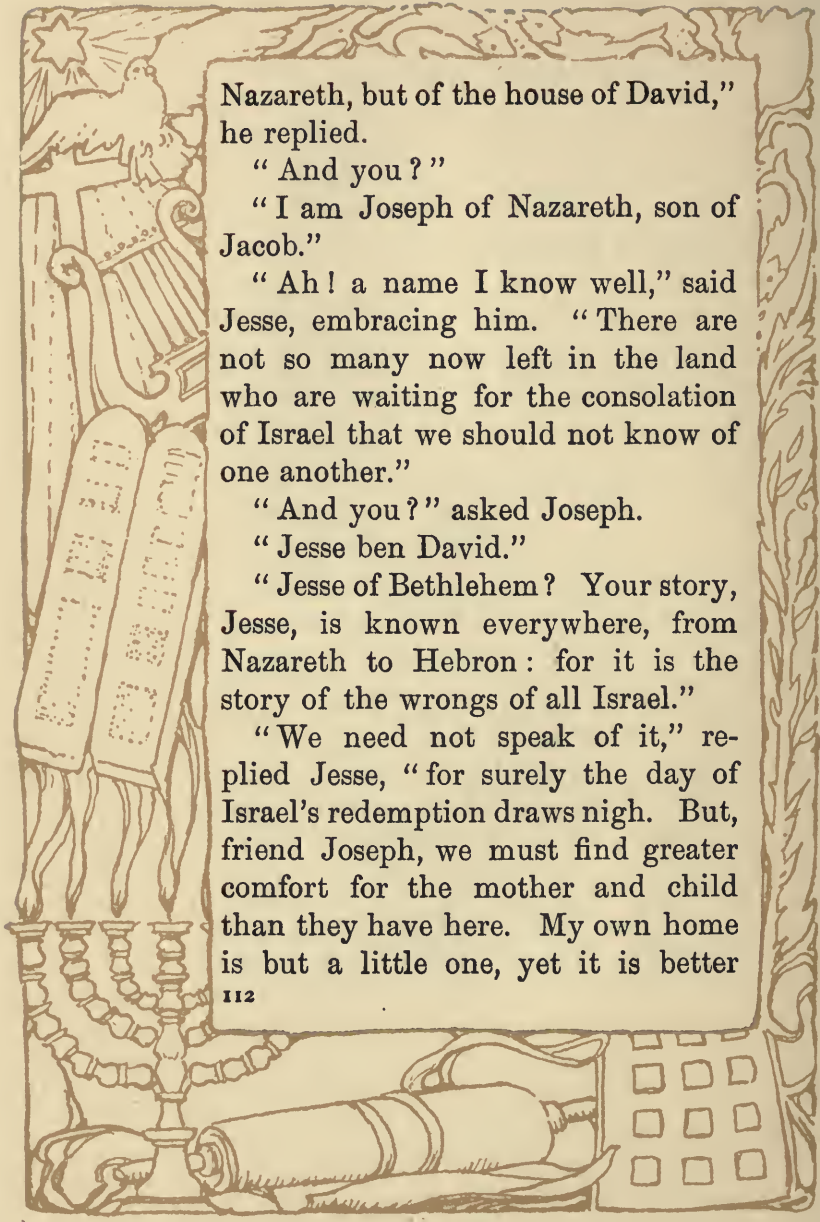
“Amen!” responded the shepherds.

“Amen and Amen!” said the centurion.

When the others had retired, Jesse remained. He spoke to the venerable Galilean,—

“Your daughter?”

“The child is that of Mary of



Nazareth, but of the house of David," he replied.

"And you?"

"I am Joseph of Nazareth, son of Jacob."

"Ah! a name I know well," said Jesse, embracing him. "There are not so many now left in the land who are waiting for the consolation of Israel that we should not know of one another."

"And you?" asked Joseph.

"Jesse ben David."

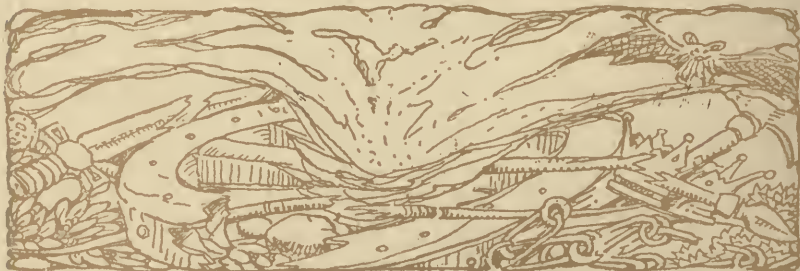
"Jesse of Bethlehem? Your story, Jesse, is known everywhere, from Nazareth to Hebron: for it is the story of the wrongs of all Israel."

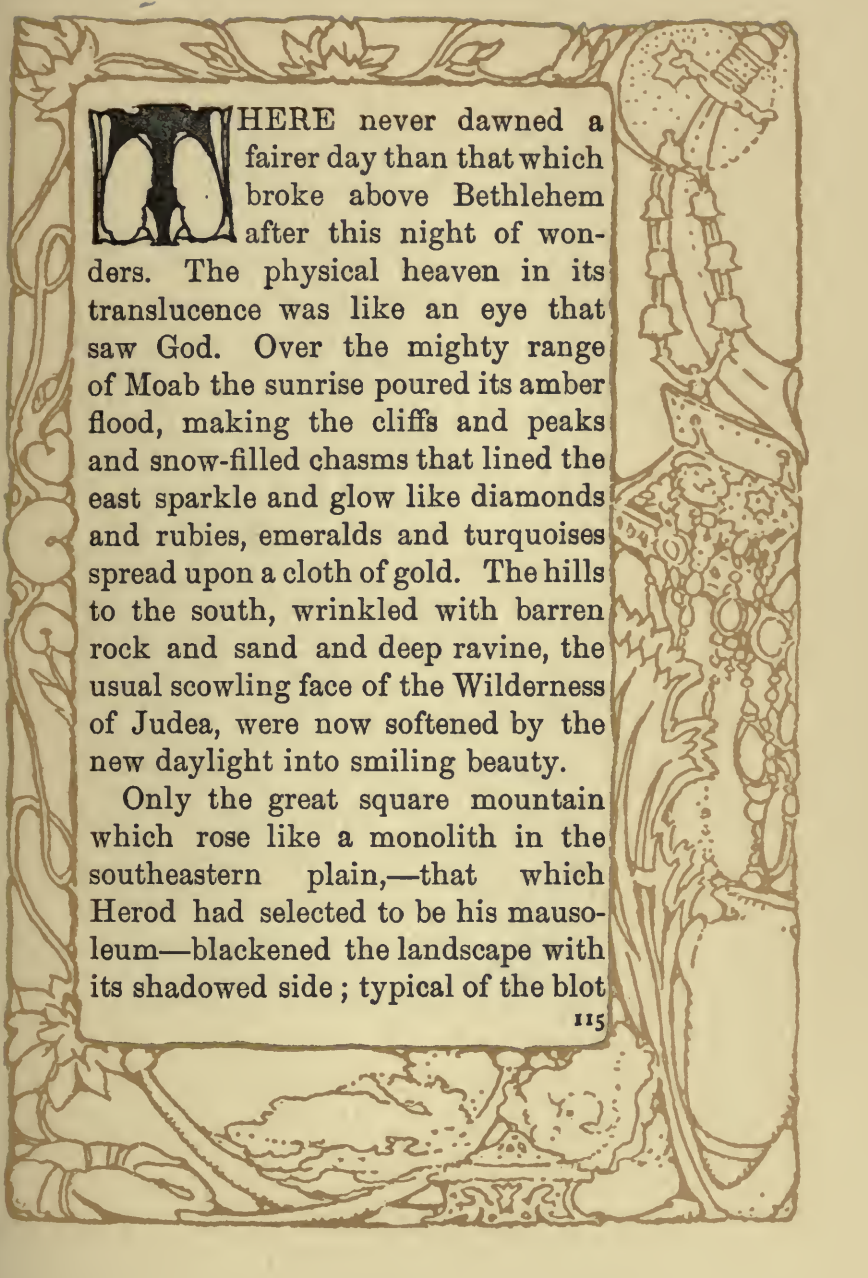
"We need not speak of it," replied Jesse, "for surely the day of Israel's redemption draws nigh. But, friend Joseph, we must find greater comfort for the mother and child than they have here. My own home is but a little one, yet it is better

than the din of this place. The air is pure and sweet. One may at least see the clouds and stars from it, and be touched by the sun which has 'healing in his wings.' "

"That greater sun of righteousness of which you are thinking, friend Jesse, may soon arise," said Joseph. "I have that in my knowledge which I may not tell to others, until the Lord loosens my lips. For Mary's sake and the Child's I will go with you."








HERE never dawned a fairer day than that which broke above Bethlehem after this night of wonders. The physical heaven in its translucence was like an eye that saw God. Over the mighty range of Moab the sunrise poured its amber flood, making the cliffs and peaks and snow-filled chasms that lined the east sparkle and glow like diamonds and rubies, emeralds and turquoises spread upon a cloth of gold. The hills to the south, wrinkled with barren rock and sand and deep ravine, the usual scowling face of the Wilderness of Judea, were now softened by the new daylight into smiling beauty.

Only the great square mountain which rose like a monolith in the southeastern plain,—that which Herod had selected to be his mausoleum—blackened the landscape with its shadowed side ; typical of the blot



which his life had made upon the history of his times.

The villagers had slept late after the wakefulness of the night. But the streets were now astir with a new excitement.

Three camels entered the gateway of the western wall. Each was led by an attendant wearing a close-fitting, conical cap, short coat and bagged trousers whose dusky brown colour was relieved by a girdle of scarlet. Upon the camels, and in picturesque contrast with the purple housings and fringes which almost entirely covered the bodies of the beasts, rode the Wise Men in their freshly-wound turbans and robes of glistening white satin.

They asked their way of no one, as in single file they went through the narrow street. When they came to the house of Jesse, Balthazar bade them halt.

"Shall we not go on to the Khan?" asked Cambos, the steward.

"First we will inquire here," replied the Persian, gazing up at the house. "It was surely this one; for none other has so large a chamber upon the roof.

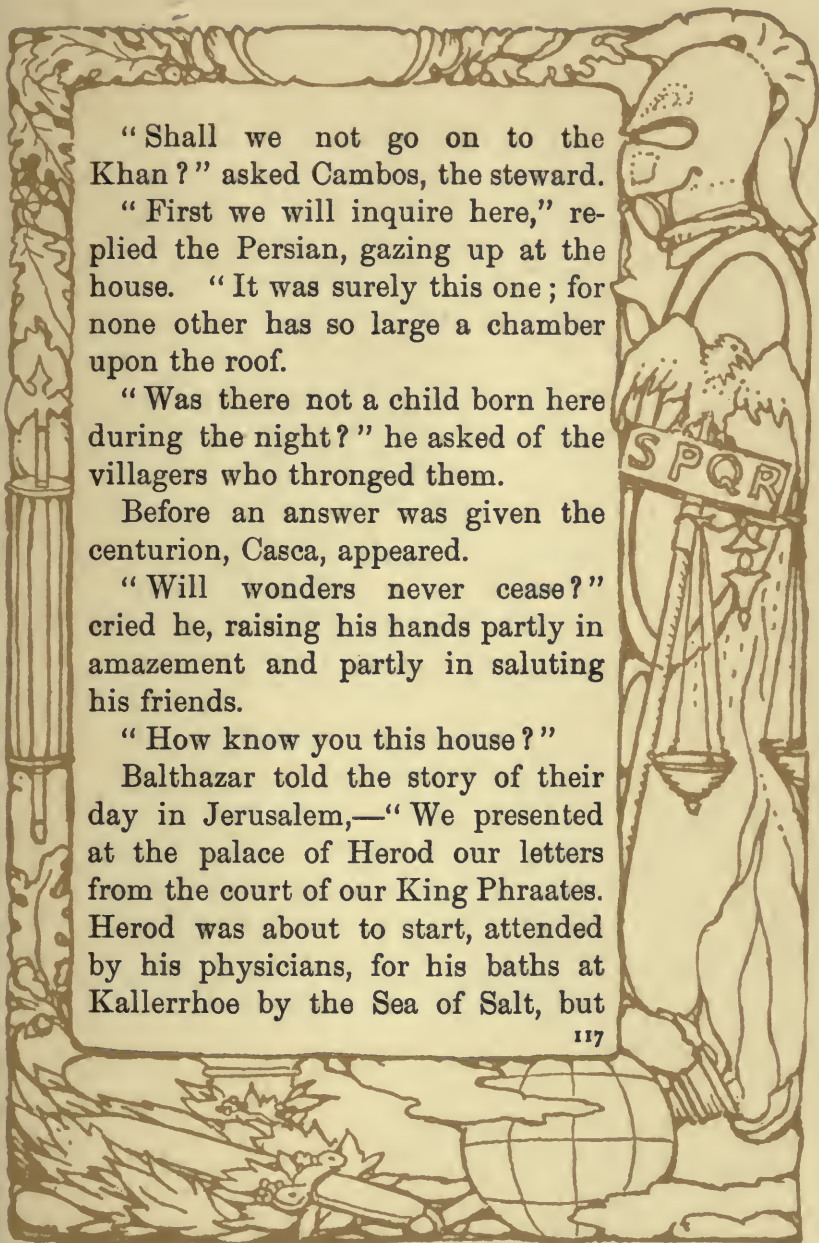
"Was there not a child born here during the night?" he asked of the villagers who thronged them.

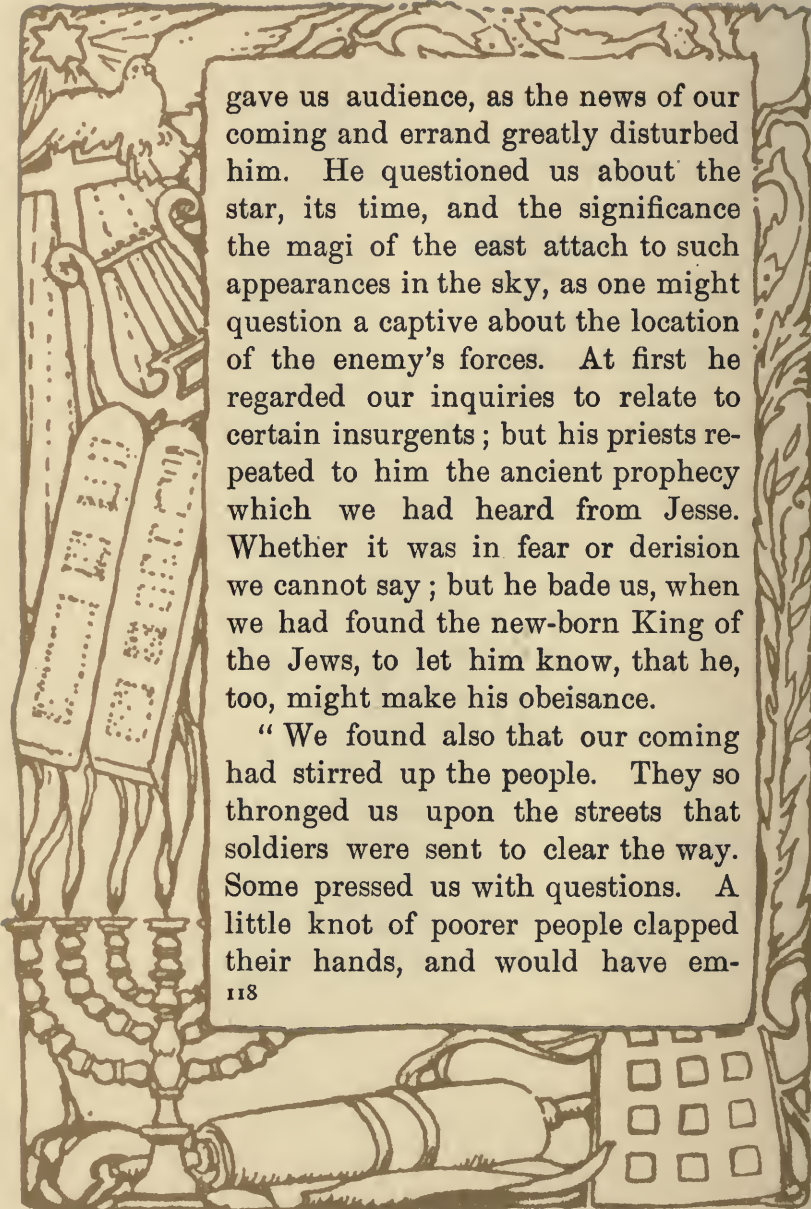
Before an answer was given the centurion, Casca, appeared.

"Will wonders never cease?" cried he, raising his hands partly in amazement and partly in saluting his friends.

"How know you this house?"

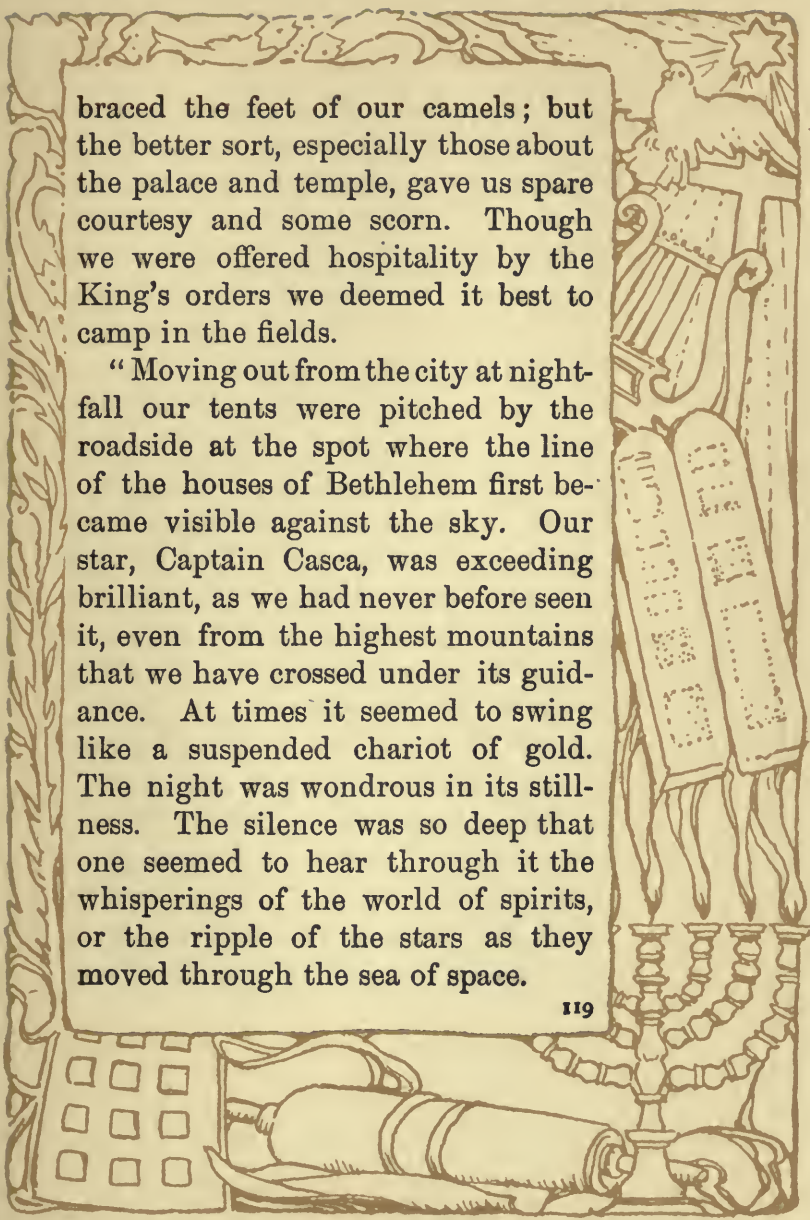
Balthazar told the story of their day in Jerusalem,—“We presented at the palace of Herod our letters from the court of our King Phraates. Herod was about to start, attended by his physicians, for his baths at Kallerrhoe by the Sea of Salt, but





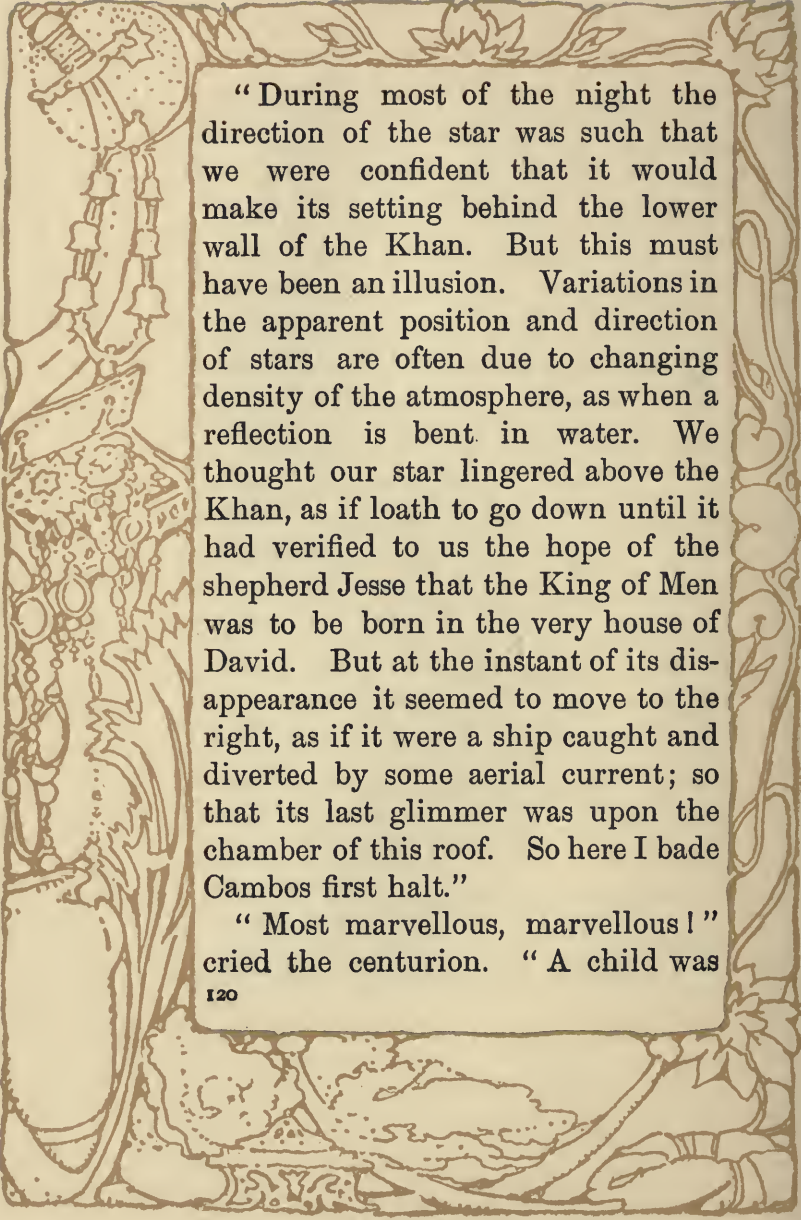
gave us audience, as the news of our coming and errand greatly disturbed him. He questioned us about the star, its time, and the significance the magi of the east attach to such appearances in the sky, as one might question a captive about the location of the enemy's forces. At first he regarded our inquiries to relate to certain insurgents; but his priests repeated to him the ancient prophecy which we had heard from Jesse. Whether it was in fear or derision we cannot say; but he bade us, when we had found the new-born King of the Jews, to let him know, that he, too, might make his obeisance.

"We found also that our coming had stirred up the people. They so thronged us upon the streets that soldiers were sent to clear the way. Some pressed us with questions. A little knot of poorer people clapped their hands, and would have em-



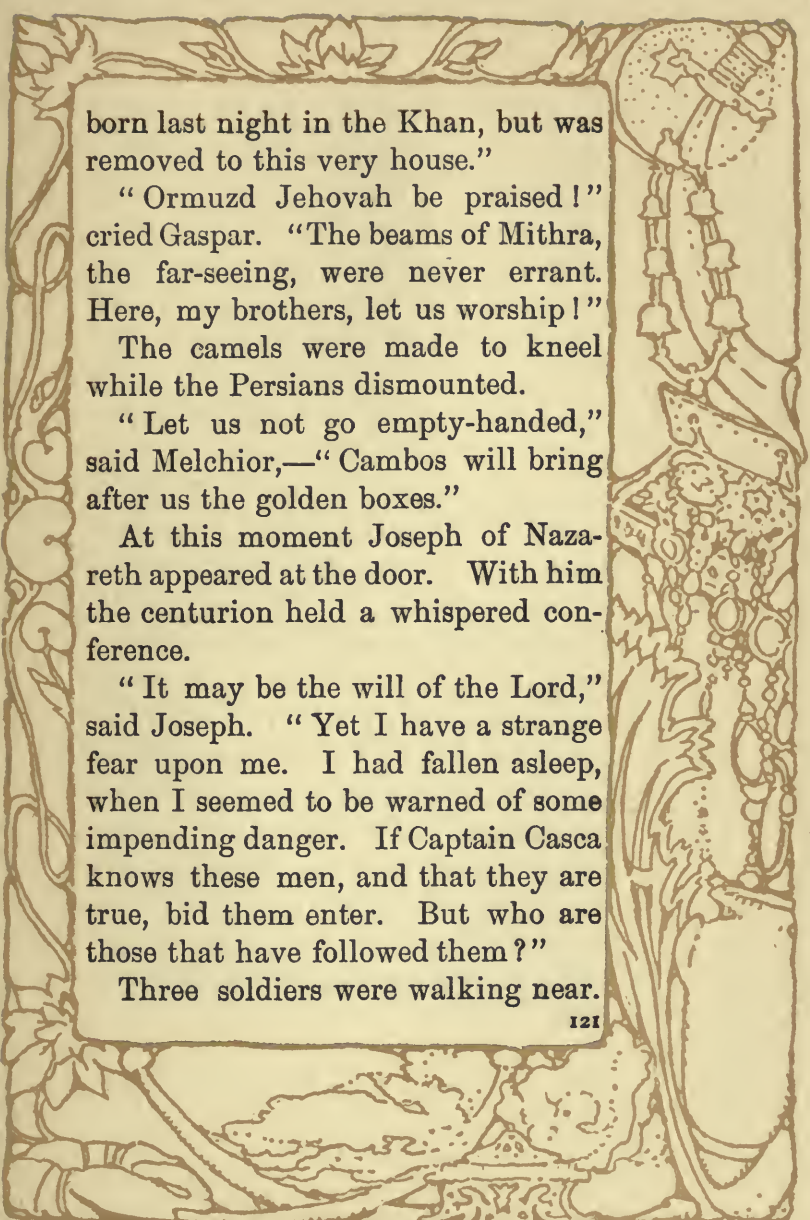
braced the feet of our camels ; but the better sort, especially those about the palace and temple, gave us spare courtesy and some scorn. Though we were offered hospitality by the King's orders we deemed it best to camp in the fields.

“Moving out from the city at nightfall our tents were pitched by the roadside at the spot where the line of the houses of Bethlehem first became visible against the sky. Our star, Captain Casca, was exceeding brilliant, as we had never before seen it, even from the highest mountains that we have crossed under its guidance. At times it seemed to swing like a suspended chariot of gold. The night was wondrous in its stillness. The silence was so deep that one seemed to hear through it the whisperings of the world of spirits, or the ripple of the stars as they moved through the sea of space.



"During most of the night the direction of the star was such that we were confident that it would make its setting behind the lower wall of the Khan. But this must have been an illusion. Variations in the apparent position and direction of stars are often due to changing density of the atmosphere, as when a reflection is bent in water. We thought our star lingered above the Khan, as if loath to go down until it had verified to us the hope of the shepherd Jesse that the King of Men was to be born in the very house of David. But at the instant of its disappearance it seemed to move to the right, as if it were a ship caught and diverted by some aerial current; so that its last glimmer was upon the chamber of this roof. So here I bade Cambos first halt."

"Most marvellous, marvellous!" cried the centurion. "A child was



born last night in the Khan, but was removed to this very house."

"Ormuzd Jehovah be praised!" cried Gaspar. "The beams of Mithra, the far-seeing, were never errant. Here, my brothers, let us worship!"


The camels were made to kneel while the Persians dismounted.

"Let us not go empty-handed," said Melchior,— "Cambos will bring after us the golden boxes."

At this moment Joseph of Nazareth appeared at the door. With him the centurion held a whispered conference.

"It may be the will of the Lord," said Joseph. "Yet I have a strange fear upon me. I had fallen asleep, when I seemed to be warned of some impending danger. If Captain Casca knows these men, and that they are true, bid them enter. But who are those that have followed them?"

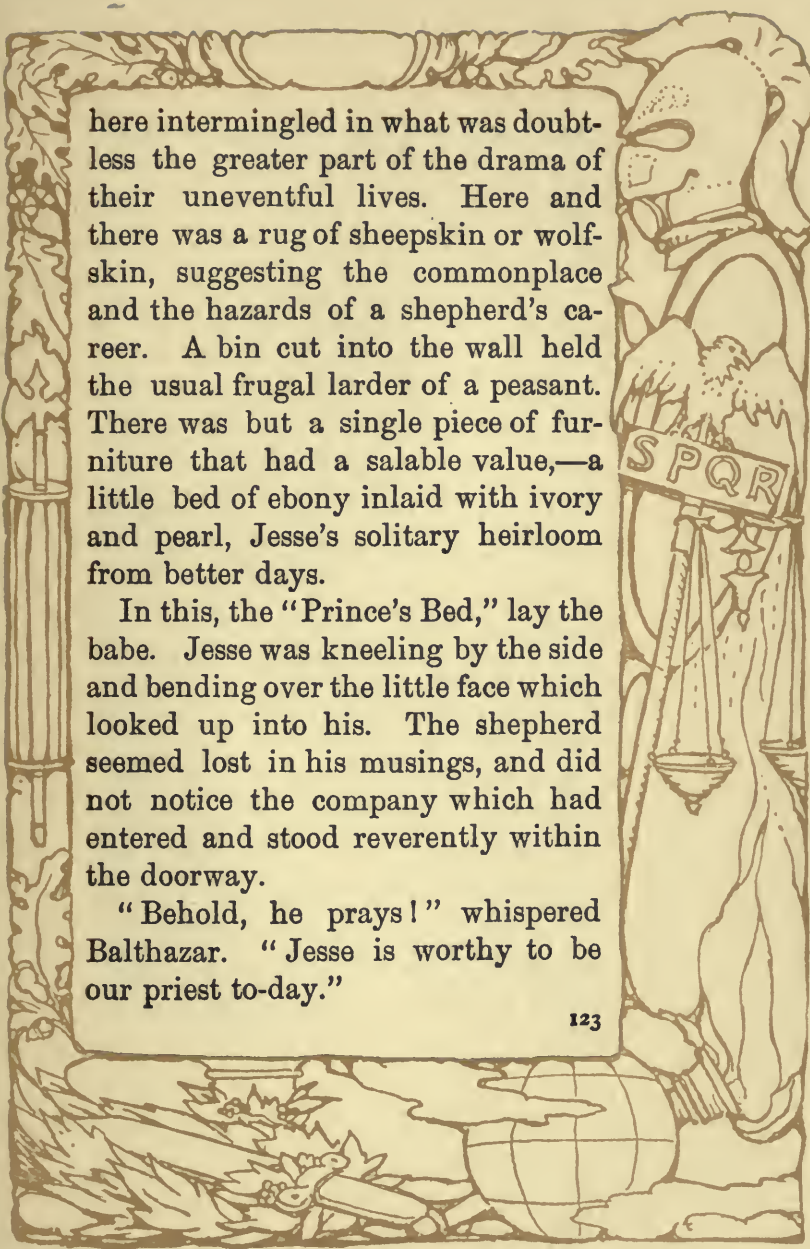
Three soldiers were walking near.



As Casca observed them inquiringly, one stopped to purchase a handful of dates at a little shop in the wall of the adjacent house. Another asked in a loud voice the way to the Heroes' Well, only to be answered by a bystander that he wondered the soldier had not fallen into it, since he was so blind as not to have seen it in passing.

The centurion approached the soldiers, while Joseph conducted the Persians into the lower room of the house of Jesse.

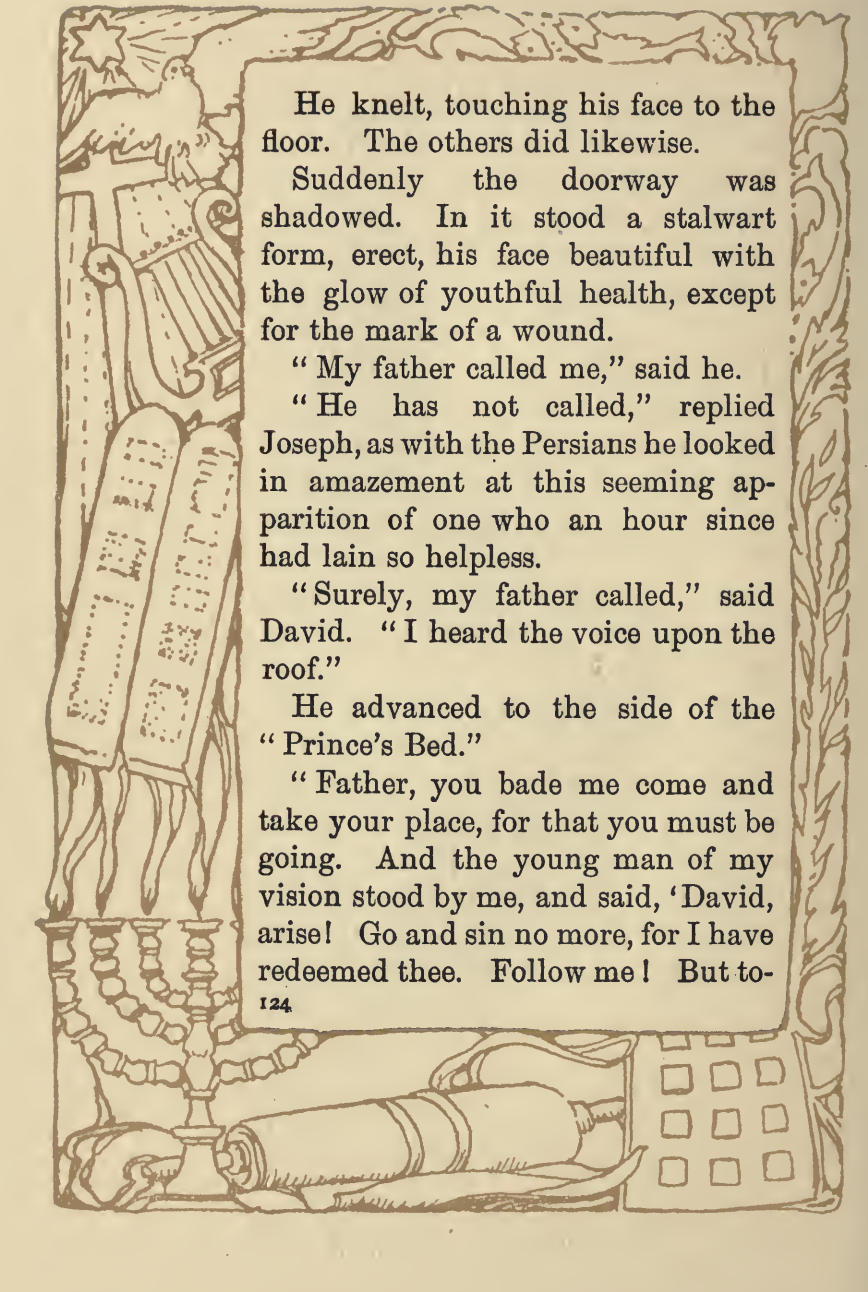
This room was lighted by the sunshine which poured through a little window high up against the ceiling. In a corner, shaded from the strong light and from obtrusive gaze by a curtain of flax, was a cot upon which lay Mary of Nazareth. The floor was of earth, beaten hard by the feet of many generations of parents and children whose joys and sorrows had

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here intermingled in what was doubtless the greater part of the drama of their uneventful lives. Here and there was a rug of sheepskin or wolf-skin, suggesting the commonplace and the hazards of a shepherd's career. A bin cut into the wall held the usual frugal larder of a peasant. There was but a single piece of furniture that had a salable value,—a little bed of ebony inlaid with ivory and pearl, Jesse's solitary heirloom from better days.

In this, the "Prince's Bed," lay the babe. Jesse was kneeling by the side and bending over the little face which looked up into his. The shepherd seemed lost in his musings, and did not notice the company which had entered and stood reverently within the doorway.

"Behold, he prays!" whispered Balthazar. "Jesse is worthy to be our priest to-day."



He knelt, touching his face to the floor. The others did likewise.

Suddenly the doorway was shadowed. In it stood a stalwart form, erect, his face beautiful with the glow of youthful health, except for the mark of a wound.

"My father called me," said he.

"He has not called," replied Joseph, as with the Persians he looked in amazement at this seeming apparition of one who an hour since had lain so helpless.

"Surely, my father called," said David. "I heard the voice upon the roof."

He advanced to the side of the "Prince's Bed."

"Father, you bade me come and take your place, for that you must be going. And the young man of my vision stood by me, and said, 'David, arise! Go and sin no more, for I have redeemed thee. Follow me! But to-

day thou shalt lead, and I will follow thee.' At these words my strength came to me. Father ——"

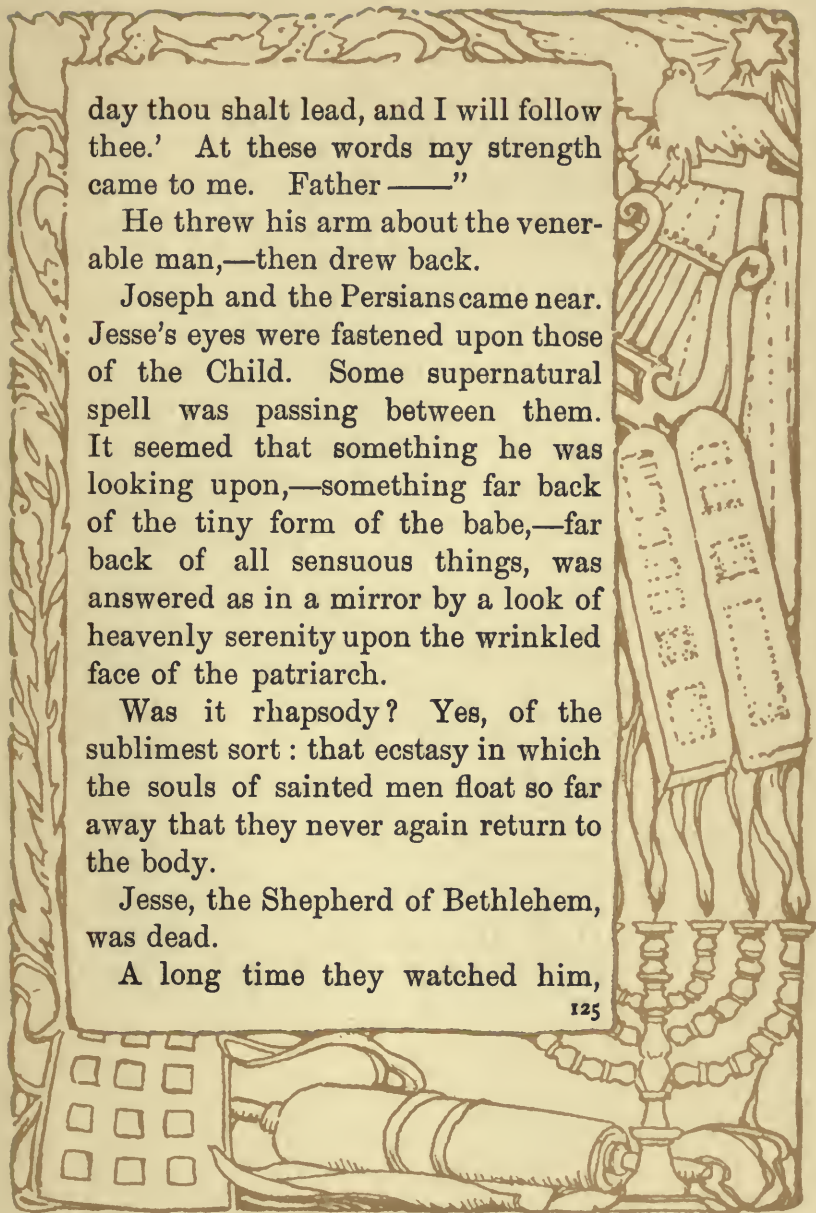
He threw his arm about the venerable man,—then drew back.

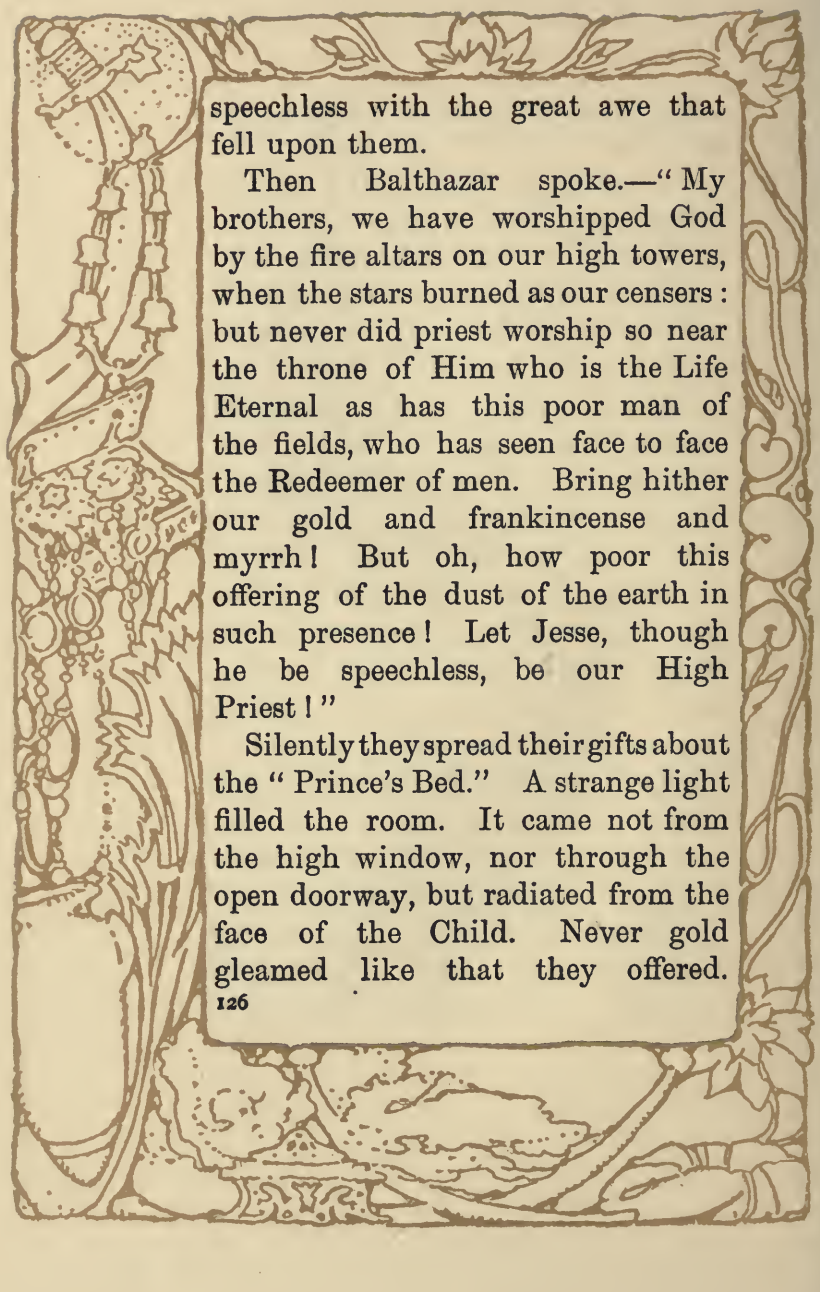
Joseph and the Persians came near. Jesse's eyes were fastened upon those of the Child. Some supernatural spell was passing between them. It seemed that something he was looking upon,—something far back of the tiny form of the babe,—far back of all sensuous things, was answered as in a mirror by a look of heavenly serenity upon the wrinkled face of the patriarch.

Was it rhapsody? Yes, of the sublimest sort: that ecstasy in which the souls of sainted men float so far away that they never again return to the body.

Jesse, the Shepherd of Bethlehem, was dead.

A long time they watched him,

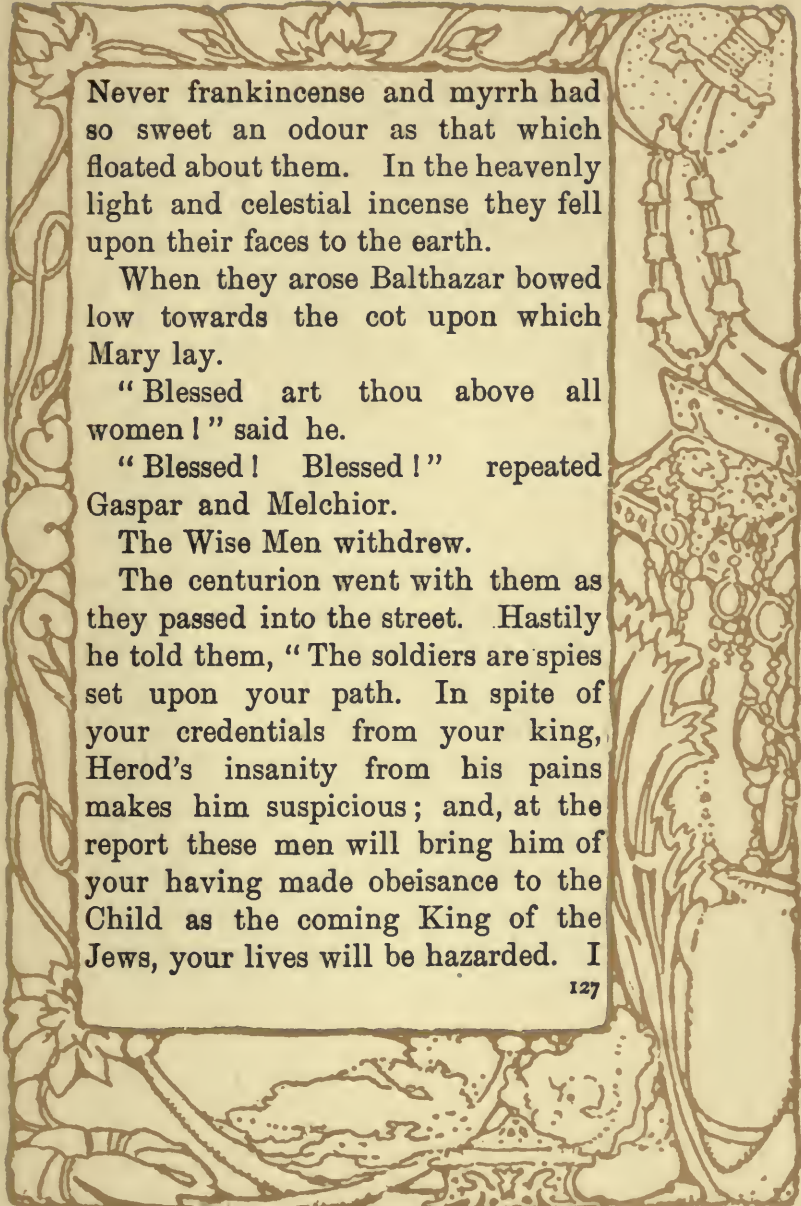




speechless with the great awe that fell upon them.

Then Balthazar spoke.—“ My brothers, we have worshipped God by the fire altars on our high towers, when the stars burned as our censers : but never did priest worship so near the throne of Him who is the Life Eternal as has this poor man of the fields, who has seen face to face the Redeemer of men. Bring hither our gold and frankincense and myrrh ! But oh, how poor this offering of the dust of the earth in such presence ! Let Jesse, though he be speechless, be our High Priest ! ”

Silently they spread their gifts about the “ Prince’s Bed.” A strange light filled the room. It came not from the high window, nor through the open doorway, but radiated from the face of the Child. Never gold gleamed like that they offered.



Never frankincense and myrrh had so sweet an odour as that which floated about them. In the heavenly light and celestial incense they fell upon their faces to the earth.


When they arose Balthazar bowed low towards the cot upon which Mary lay.

"Blessed art thou above all women!" said he.

"Blessed! Blessed!" repeated Gaspar and Melchior.

The Wise Men withdrew.

The centurion went with them as they passed into the street. Hastily he told them, "The soldiers are spies set upon your path. In spite of your credentials from your king, Herod's insanity from his pains makes him suspicious; and, at the report these men will bring him of your having made obeisance to the Child as the coming King of the Jews, your lives will be hazarded. I

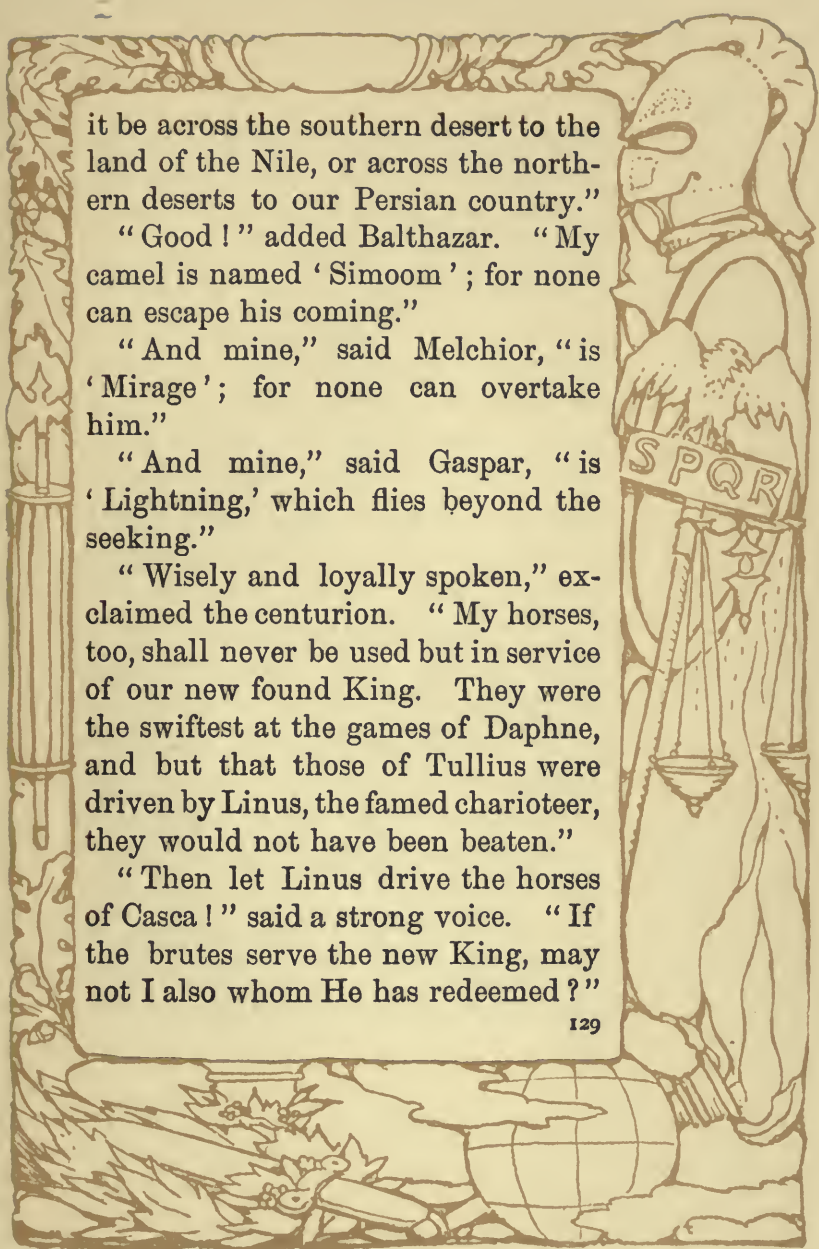


advise that you take ship at Joppa, and land as far north of Herod's domain as Berytus, whence you can journey safely over the Lebanons."

"You speak wisely," replied Balthazar, "for my dreams have warned me that our return homeward would be menaced."

"Your camels would have to be disposed of," replied Casca. "But lest there should not be a ready mart for them at Joppa, I myself will buy them at their full value."

"No!" interrupted Gaspar. "These beasts, having once been in the service of the King of Men shall be put to no less honourable use. If we, the mere inquirers concerning the coming King are menaced, surely Herod will not spare the King Himself. Let our camels be in waiting, at Joppa, or Gaza or Hebron, and, if danger threatens the Child, let their fleetness bring him to safety, though



it be across the southern desert to the land of the Nile, or across the northern deserts to our Persian country."

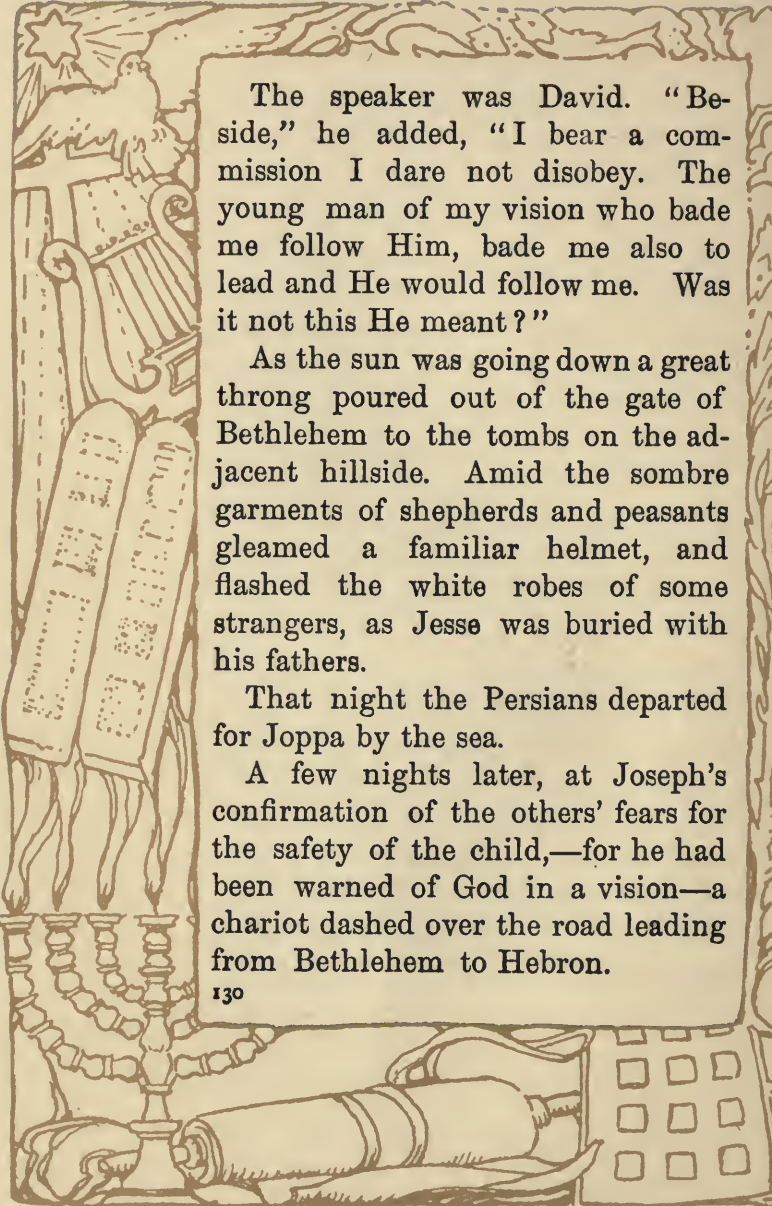
"Good!" added Balthazar. "My camel is named 'Simoom'; for none can escape his coming."

"And mine," said Melchior, "is 'Mirage'; for none can overtake him."

"And mine," said Gaspar, "is 'Lightning,' which flies beyond the seeking."

"Wisely and loyally spoken," exclaimed the centurion. "My horses, too, shall never be used but in service of our new found King. They were the swiftest at the games of Daphne, and but that those of Tullius were driven by Linus, the famed charioteer, they would not have been beaten."

"Then let Linus drive the horses of Casca!" said a strong voice. "If the brutes serve the new King, may not I also whom He has redeemed?"

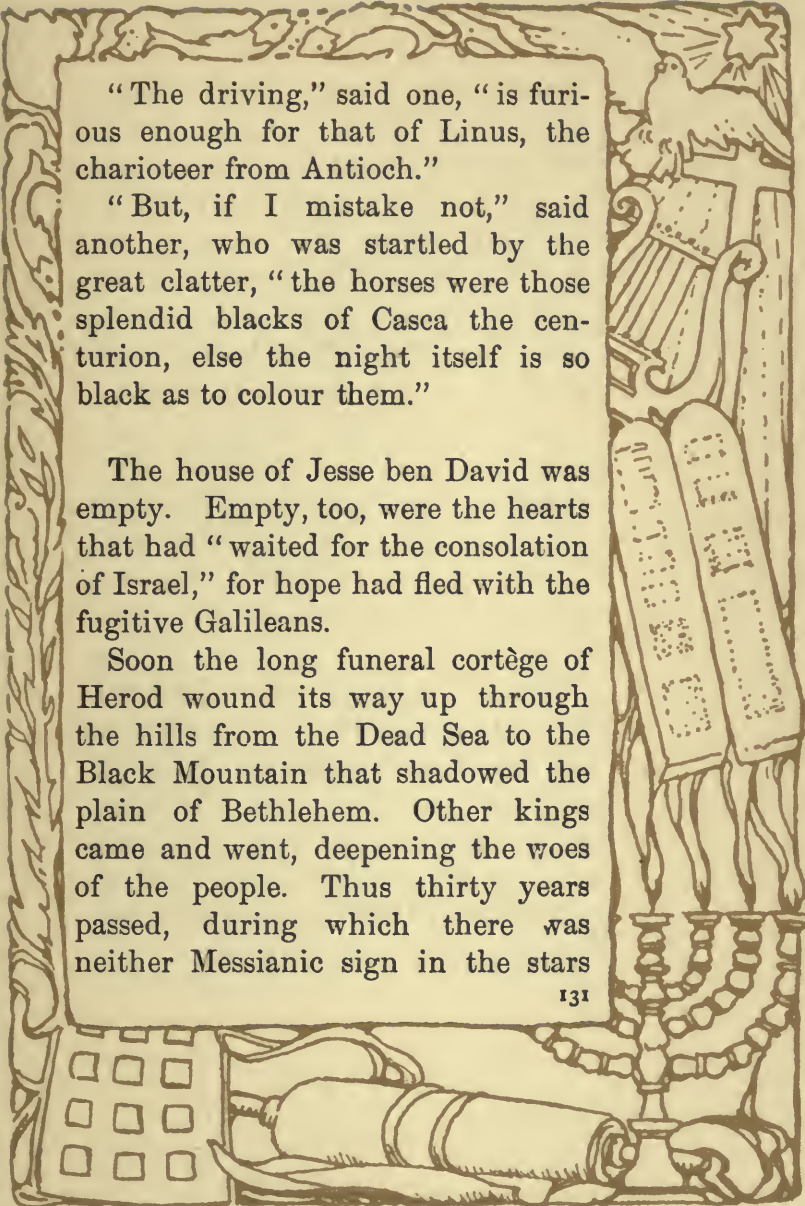


The speaker was David. "Beside," he added, "I bear a commission I dare not disobey. The young man of my vision who bade me follow Him, bade me also to lead and He would follow me. Was it not this He meant?"

As the sun was going down a great throng poured out of the gate of Bethlehem to the tombs on the adjacent hillside. Amid the sombre garments of shepherds and peasants gleamed a familiar helmet, and flashed the white robes of some strangers, as Jesse was buried with his fathers.

That night the Persians departed for Joppa by the sea.

A few nights later, at Joseph's confirmation of the others' fears for the safety of the child,—for he had been warned of God in a vision—a chariot dashed over the road leading from Bethlehem to Hebron.



"The driving," said one, "is furious enough for that of Linus, the charioteer from Antioch."

"But, if I mistake not," said another, who was startled by the great clatter, "the horses were those splendid blacks of Casca the centurion, else the night itself is so black as to colour them."

The house of Jesse ben David was empty. Empty, too, were the hearts that had "waited for the consolation of Israel," for hope had fled with the fugitive Galileans.

Soon the long funeral cortège of Herod wound its way up through the hills from the Dead Sea to the Black Mountain that shadowed the plain of Bethlehem. Other kings came and went, deepening the woes of the people. Thus thirty years passed, during which there was neither Messianic sign in the stars

nor vision among the dreamers of earth.

One day on the banks of the Jordan a great Prophet preacher startled the crowds that thronged him. He pointed to a young man and cried out, "Behold, I saw the Spirit of God descend from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon Him."

One who heard the Prophet turned to look.

"Casca," he cried to an old officer of the Legion who was with him. "Casca, He is the young man of my vision !"









